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# THE GREAT GULF FIXED.



# THE GREAT GULF FIXED.

A Novel.

By GERALD GRANT,

AUTHOR OF

"COMING HOME TO BOOST," "OLD CROSS QUARRY," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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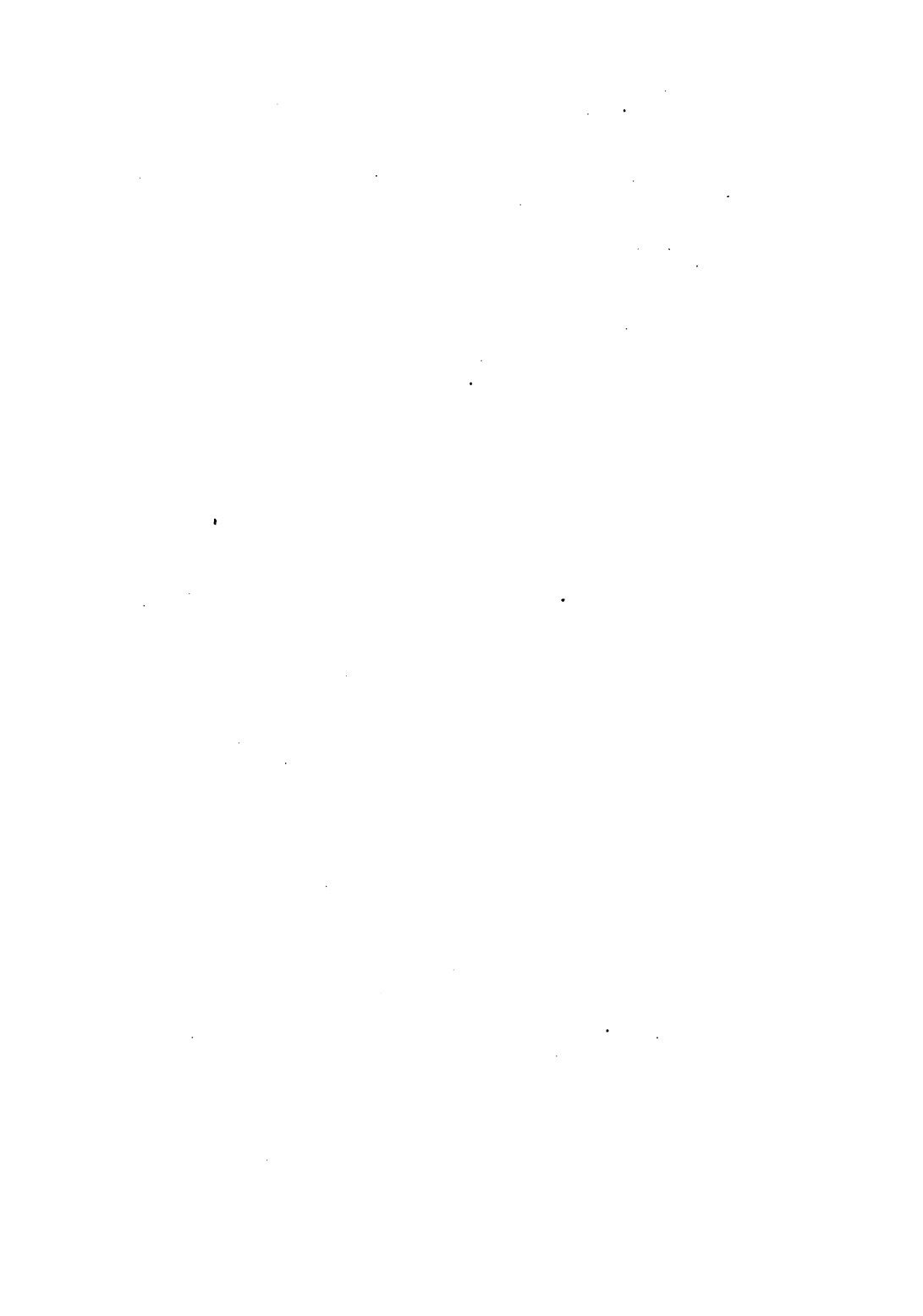
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# THE GREAT GULF FIXED.



## CHAPTER I.

A PLEASANT summer evening ; a pleasant breeze swaying lightly the tall tree-tops ; pleasant sunlight glinting through their foliage ; a pleasant English park, and stretched beneath an oak the figure of a man. For nearly an hour he had lain thus, well pleased with his position, his surroundings, and the solitary current of his thoughts. He had been moralizing ; and nothing is more satisfactory than to moralize when you have the argument to yourself, when there is no one by to suggest that there may be two sides to the question, that it may not be quite as conclusive as

you would have it appear. He had been moralizing upon the power that lies in every man to carve out his own destiny, to force his way onward and upward spite of every obstacle. Outward circumstances he had set aside altogether. If the beggar did not rise, it was because he had not the power within him, and not because he was a beggar. If the man who began with fortune and position made for himself a great name, it was owing, of course, to his intrinsic worth, and in no way to the start with which fortune had favoured him.

The man who lay under the oak was ambitious, and his reflections had much to do with his own future. Convinced that he was of the stuff of which greatness is made, he counted upon ultimate success, having faith in himself as the *man*, and not as the Squire, Master of Treherne, and of the large iron works that lay on the other side of the river. Having had it all his own way for nearly thirty years, it was but natural that he should look boldly into the future, which

meant for him a public life. He wished to enter Parliament, and felt pretty sure of being returned member at the next election. He had too much power and influence, socially as well as morally, for the county not to be anxious to serve him. Not a dog would dare wag its tongue. "Ah! by Jove!"

A pair of lurid eyes looking into his; a black muzzle brought into close contact with his cheek; a heavy panting breath playing with his tawny moustache.

The master of Treherne raised himself on to his elbow and sternly demanded of the intruder—a dog of huge size and fierce, unprepossessing appearance—what the deuce he meant by intruding upon his privacy, and betraying him by his ugly and most unwelcome presence into a momentary loss of dignity?

By way of answer, the ill-favoured stranger uttered a low growl, but at the same time he turned tail and made off.

Mr. Treherne having raised himself from

his elbow to his feet and lighted a cigar, watched him as he trotted heavily away, until he at last disappeared in the wood which bordered the park on that side, and actually deemed him worth a speculation.

“A stranger in these parts evidently, a fresh acquisition of the butcher, no doubt, a vulgar, low-bred cur of an inquiring turn of mind. Does not see why he should not follow his nose wherever it may lead him, even into a gentleman’s private grounds.”

Smoking and speculating, he had sauntered up to the wood, when he was startled by the sound of a sharp whistle twice repeated, and dashing noisily through the brushwood, the ill-mannered intruder again appeared upon the scene, brushing past him with the most offensive disregard to his rights of proprietorship. But another trespasser there must be, and not far off, for the crackling sound in the wood did not cease—on the contrary, it grew louder and louder. Woe betide that second intruder, whoever he might be, quadruped or biped, for the

master of Treherne stood ready to receive him with Jove's thunder on his brow.

Fortunately, more storms gather than are allowed to burst; and when the lightning glance fell suddenly upon a young girl, who started back on finding herself face to face with such a tall stranger, it did not blast her.

Her face flushed, her skirts torn, the whistle half raised to her lips, she stood one moment quite still, looking up at him from under the broad brim of her hat. The setting sun shining into her eyes prevented her seeing him as distinctly as he saw her; and as, with a slow careless movement he stepped aside to allow of her passing out, she seemed all at once to awake to the fact that she had been staring at him and he at her longer than was absolutely necessary. Whereupon she grew, of course, much redder than she had been before, shot up at him one last look, which was meant to be deprecating, but was only saucy when taken in conjunction with the rebellious

curves of her lips, for she was evidently laughing to herself, though she felt rather shy, and was trying hard to look dignified and at her ease.

“Rather a pretty girl to have such an ugly brute of a companion,” was what Mr. Treherne was saying to himself as he watched, not the pretty girl, but the ugly brute who, keeping close at his mistress’ side, dared actually, *en passant*, to growl at him—the lord of the domain, where he was only a miserable trespasser!

“Down, Klint—down. For shame! He always growls—but he won’t bite,” with a little patronizing nod.

A path skirted the wood to the left, and down that path girl and dog disappeared. By turning his head, Squire Treherne might have kept them in sight for a quarter of a mile at least; but he did not turn his head, not being in the least interested.

“Ha, Rawdon, is that you? Good evening.”

“Mr. Treherne—I beg your pardon—I

did not see you. Thank you. Good evening."

The speaker's voice, musical and vibrating, had in it a certain nervous tremor, as if the sudden greeting had startled him. The colour, too, came and went, as he spoke, over the sharp, delicate features. The man was evidently not at his ease.

John Rawdon was the village school-master, and a rather interesting specimen of his class. Pale, slight, auburn-haired, deep-eyed, and, heightening the air of refinement that will often characterize the man who, whatever his birth, lives a life of thought rather than of action, there was the vague look of suffering that always attends any physical defect; for John Rawdon was lame.

Standing thus together, no two men could have presented a greater contrast; everything about the squire being manly in the extreme, strong, supple, and yet massive. Such a *physique* must have insured him respect in any rank of life. How could



you despise even a coal-heaver with such an enviable breadth of chest, such symmetry of limb, and a head set so royally on his shoulders?

"Fine evening—eh, Rawdon?"

"A fine evening; yes, a fine evening," the schoolmaster echoed dreamily, and his gaze, uncertain and shadowy, wandered away to where a mass of purple, gold-edged cloud veiled the setting sun.

A cool delicious breeze<sup>a</sup> was blowing towards them from across the wood. The squire drew a deep breath. There are those to whom the fact of existence, the mere sense of being, is real physical enjoyment; it was so very often to Carlton Treherne. He waited until the passing breeze had died away, then he turned to the practical concerns of life; not his life, but that of the schoolmaster.

"How are things getting on down at the school? No more rows, I hope?"

The squire laughed; the schoolmaster sighed.

"The times are against you—eh, Rawdon; the spirit of revolt is abroad even among the youngsters?"

The squire's tone was careless, not to say contemptuous. No landed proprietor in the county took more active interest in his tenants and dependents; but then he had a hundred other interests that lay as near, or nearer, to his heart than did the village school, which could not therefore be to him what it was to the pale-faced master—his one haunting care.

Carlton Treherne, whose political schemes embraced the welfare of a nation, might well treat with contempt the puny efforts of a few unruly urchins to set authority at defiance; but to John Rawdon, whose life was spent in the schoolroom, things looked very different.

Mr. Treherne returned to the contemplation of his cigar, and strolled on, accommodating his pace to the halting gait of his companion.

"By-the-by," he remarked at last, still

carelessly, when the cigar had been puffed into a satisfactory state of glow, "what is that I hear about you and Jim Bates? You two don't seem to hit it?"

John Rawdon turned white to his very lips, which parted as if to speak, but, unfortunately, his speech halted at times as well as his gait, and the squire waited in vain for an answer.

"I always looked upon Farmer Bates as the greatest bully in the place, and no doubt his son takes after him. But I would not stand it, Rawdon. Give the fellow Jim a flogging if he deserves it, and the father, too, if he dares to interfere; I would."

And perhaps he would, and with impunity. One endowed with such physical advantages might well try force when other means had failed.

John Rawdon only smiled at the characteristic advice; they had been boys together, and playmates, too, once upon a time. Argument first, and when that failed, as you must prove victor in every contest—the

force of your social superiority, or the superior force of your blows. The schoolmaster understood the squire far better than the squire understood him. Nor did he expect to be understood. How was it possible? How could the man who from his cradle had had it all his own way, feel as he, the village schoolmaster, did? Hard experience had taught John Rawdon many things; amongst others, not to expect impossibilities. Carlton Treherne was his patron, and had been always; friends they were not, and never could be. Friendship means perfect sympathy, and the two men whose lives lay so far apart might feel for, but never with, each other.

“The farmer complained that his son learnt nothing but mischief at school, and spoke of removing him.”

“I wish he would,” with energy.

Mr. Treherne looked amused. “Ha, Rawdon, that’s where not only you, but half the great politicians of the world, make the mistake. You begin with an attempt

to remedy an evil, and finding that that involves too much trouble, you rest satisfied with a compromise, and end by merely getting rid of it. Jim Bates will be Jim Bates still, and the black sheep wherever he may go. The evil will exist, though it has ceased to annoy you."

"You are right," the schoolmaster assented, but in a very low tone, and passing his hand wearily over his eyes. "He will work mischief wherever he goes; but I was only thinking of his evil influence over the other boys." And wishing the squire good-bye, John Rawdon limped off.

The sun had set, the breeze had changed to a low, sighing wind, the pleasure of the evening stroll was over, his one thought now was to get home.

## CHAPTER II.

IN the length and breadth of old England there was not to be found a worthier or more cosy couple than Mr. and Mrs. Lane, of the Cottage, Didford. They had christened it "*The Cottage*," because they fondly believed that there was not its equal in the county for comfort and convenience. It was Mr. Lane himself who had built it, and it certainly was a very snug little nest for two. I had almost said for one, for never was the commandment, "To be no more twain, but one flesh," more literally carried out than in this instance. To see them in the snug family pew or snug pony-chaise, side by side, was a picture. So close they sat, so plump they both were, so exactly of

a height, that it would have been difficult to say where the one ended and the other began.

And so it was in all things. An opinion expressed by the one was echoed by the other; if the one began a sentence, the other would finish it. In short, their married life was a harmonious duet, and how they ever came thus comfortably to meet and unite, in this our world of confusion and mistakes, was a wonder to every one but themselves, good souls! What so natural? they would have said. Of course Joe would never have taken any one but his Mary, nor would Mary have been contented with any other than her Joe; so a kind Providence had thrown them together, and it was not likely that they would mistake His benevolent intentions towards them.

One mistake only had they made in the whole course of their harmless lives. They had entered a Volunteer Corps. I say they, for though Mrs. Lane did not herself enlist, her interest and sympathies were enlisted,

and they surely are things more worthy of mention than legs and arms.

Led astray by the smartness of the uniform, the length and glitter of the sword when drawn fiercely from the scabbard ; the devotion of whole columns to reviews and sham fights in the daily papers, for which organs of public opinion Mr. Lane entertained a profound respect, he had caught the then raging epidemic—after which a severe cold, and the natural consequences had been gruel, depression, and remorse. The regimentals once so proudly donned were laid aside in the best mahogany wardrobe, his martial ardour having, alas ! gone with his voice.

But Mrs. Lane was a capital nurse ; his voice was restored to him, and both spirit and spirits revived ; the best mahogany wardrobe was visited, and as he stroked down fondly the blade of the sword, kept bright by much manual labour, his Mary did the same by the coat and trousers, observing, with a regretful sigh—



"You did look so well in them, Joe; they were such a neat fit, and so nice and tight."

She already spoke of them as things belonging to the past.

Not many days afterwards, when he had still far more the appearance of an Egyptian mummy, swathed as he was in yards of flannel, than of a brave British officer, their soldier nephew Charlie Wilkinson honoured them with a visit, and being a beardless youth, and just then the butt of the mess-table, he naturally gave himself great airs, and laughed volunteers and volunteering to scorn.

Glances were exchanged across the table, and the regimentals were forthwith transferred from the best mahogany wardrobe to a deal press on the landing.

Further on in the annals of the Cottage, the rector having one Sunday morning sternly condemned the volunteer movement as unchristian, and calculated to arouse fierce passions in the heart of youth

and sober age alike, another look was exchanged, and the next day certain martial accoutrements, once the pride of two simple hearts, were wound in a funereal sheet and borne in solemn silence to the loft, there to be for ever buried in the depths of a big black trunk. The lid closed, the key turned, both felt that a mistake had been made, repented of, and buried in oblivion.

All this had happened years before the time of which we speak. The rage for regimentals and sham fights had long since died out, and that for polo, bicycles, etc., had succeeded. The soldier nephew was now a handsome, promising young officer, whose regiment had been ordered off to Ashantee, and Mr. and Mrs. Lane, with whom time stood still, were lingering one bright summer evening on the lawn, and having just seen the plump little pony led to the stable by a plump little groom, were watching with much delight twelve plump little chickens who were tumbling over each other on the gravel path.

They had no right to be there, and how they had contrived to find their way from the yard was a mystery known only to themselves. It was the hour at which their mistress appeared daily amongst them basket in hand; but it was their duty to await her visit on their own premises, and not invade hers.

"There must be a gap in the railing, or—Rachel must have left the gate open."

The same remark was made by both simultaneously, and the same puzzled but benign look lay on both faces, as they shook their heads at the confused heap of soft, fluffy balls at their feet.

"Come, chick—chick—chick."

"Chick—chick."

"Pretty dears! 'how they do run, to be sure."

Run!—they were off at a mad scamper, fluttering, piping, rolling over and over.

"Down, Klint—down—naughty dog!" cried out a shrill girl's voice; and the dog was caught and collared and led up the

lawn, panting with excitement, and casting sidelong eager glances on the flying squad. "Oh, auntie, he is so naughty; he runs after everybody and everything; and it seems so much worse from his being so big and—so ugly."

"Yes; rather big—and ugly," repeated the aunt, and echoed the uncle, as they cast a rueful glance on the unconscious culprit who was still panting and sending longing looks after the baby fugitives.

"He was never so ill-behaved at the rectory; there he only ran after other dogs, and boys. It must be the bracing air of Didford that makes him so wild."

"Or the example of his mistress."

"Yes, yes, the example of his mistress," echoed Uncle Joe; and uncle and aunt looked at the girl with an indulgent smile, and shook their heads at her as they had done at the truant chickens. They knew very little about young people, but their niece Rachel was on a visit at the Cottage; and wishing her to feel quite at home there,

they only smiled at all her vagaries, not knowing what to make of them or her.

Was she looking so very wild? Her walk through the wood had been rather a scramble; her veil and hair had been caught more than once in the brambles, and she remembered, to her shame, that one side of the holland skirt had been looped up, not because it was graceful, but because it was torn. She took a general survey of herself as far as she could, and tried hard to look unconscious and demure, but her eyes were dancing, and dimples peeping out of odd corners all over the small dark face.

“Oh, auntie, we have had such a delicious walk, and we lost our way, and——”

A plump little maid had appeared in the veranda, and Rachel knew that tea was ready. Tea ready; the dear old people so punctual, and she always the last! She left the sentence unfinished, and nearly upsetting the small maid, dashed up the stairs, taking three at a time.

“I shall be late again. No, I shan’t.

The dear old things are so slow. Five minutes they take to realize the daily fact of the meal, five more to put away the corn-basket—five and five make ten—I shall do it!”

And so she did, and appeared at the tea-table just as the first cup of tea was being poured out.

It was no very meritorious act, perhaps, to be punctual for once, but she made the most of it, and got more praised than she had ever been blamed. Rachel liked to be praised and made much of, and treated with the consideration due to an honoured guest, and she thought Uncle Joe and Aunt Mary the dearest old couple in the world; forgiving them all their harmless platitudes and humdrum ways, only wondering every now and then, not scornfully at all, but speculatively, how people could be so kind, and slow, and passionless—following year by year the same dull round, and calling it *living*. Why, she had sat at that same table in a very high chair and a bib; a little later on in a less

high chair and a pinafore ; after which in an ordinary chair and an apron. That was nine years ago, when she was ten, for she had not visited the Cottage since ; and there were actually the same cups and saucers and plates ; the same-shaped loaves and pats of butter ; the same glass of preserve on the one side and honey on the other ; on the hearth the identical grey cat whom she had tormented then, and Klint tormented now ; and presiding over all the two plump elderly figures, not aged by a wrinkle or line, unchanged even to the cut of their clothes. Fashions might change, but they never ! Skirt and neck-cloth, deep embroidered collar, and lace cap. Nine years to have come and gone and left no trace ! Was it enviable or—dreadful ?

“ Won’t you take a little more jam, dear ? It is home-made, you know. Your uncle is very fond of jam, of strawberry jam more especially. Are you not, Joe ? ”

Out came the dimples in greater force than ever ; but their owner was hardly

responsible for them ; she did not mean to laugh at Aunt Mary, and thought it quite natural that she should say the same things in the very same tone and words every day.

She took some more jam to humour the one and keep the other company, and praised it as she did all home-made things at the Cottage, knowing it to be a form of flattery dear to the simple heart of Mrs. Lane.

“I wonder which could eat the most jam, uncle or I? I had once a bet with Charlie about nuts, and I won ; but I was so ill afterwards, and never got my bet. It was two pairs of gloves to ——” But here she broke off. When she and Charlie had made that bet, and many another equally foolish, she was a mere schoolgirl, who had valued Charlie’s favour at too high, and her own favours at too low, a price. She wisely changed the subject, returning to that of their afternoon walk.

“I wonder why Klint and I always lose our way? It is all his fault,” with a re-



proachful sigh and downward look at the uncouth favourite whose head just then rested upon her knee. "He won't let me walk along quietly as other people do. He is always rushing off, and I after him, of course, to see that he does not get into mischief. To-day we wandered about the woods until I felt like a fairy princess entangled in a labyrinth. Whatever path I followed brought me out into a park, and just below an old grey, solemn-looking house that seemed quite deserted except for two stately peacocks, that awed even Klint into respect by their solitary grandeur, for he didn't fly at them, for a wonder."

Aunt Mary looked concerned. "You must have been in the little wood just below Treherne House. The squire allows no one to pass through that——"

"Ah! that accounts for——"

"Eh!"—an exclamation of alarm.

"Oh, nothing; only when I heard carriage-wheels close by, and felt sure of being near the high-road, and had scrambled ever

so far through the prickly underwood to reach it, I found myself face to face with a very tall man, who looked at me as if I had been a poacher. But he smiled when Klint growled at him, which was kind. I wish you were not so fond of growling, you dear ugly old thing," with another sigh and a caress this time of the head still resting on her knee.

This wish host and hostess echoed heartily, but in silence; their code of hospitality—old-fashioned and immutable, as was everything about them—enjoined reticence on the subject of a guest's peculiarities, however trying to themselves.

Rachel having given an account of her wanderings and finished her tea, was now amusing herself by feeding Klint with dainty scraps of toast, laughing at the gravity with which he received and swallowed them—only to humour her, of course, as we condescend to be feasted by our babies from their liliputian tea-service.

Meanwhile, a horrible suspicion had forced

itself upon Aunt Mary, giving her a queer sensation all over, even to the roots of her hair, which seemed to be slowly erecting itself under the lace and ribbon bows; and she at last gave expression to it, in an awed whisper—

“It could—not have been—Mr. Treherne himself at whom—the dog growled!”

The brown eyes opened very wide.

“Oh no. He was quite a young man, and did not look like any one in particular; only very big, and rather angry.”

But Mrs. Lane’s mind was not set at rest; far from it.

“The squire is quite a young man,” with something of mild reproof in her tone. “Uncle Joe and I were present at his christening, and have known him ever since he was that high”—*that high* meaning, according to her measurement, something between the cream-jug and teapot.

“And is he tall and fair, with a reddish moustache, and a flat nose, and——” She was going to add—“deep grey eyes that

looked straight into mine," but got no further than the nose.

"Mr. Treherne is tall and fair, and has a moustache; as to his nose——"

"How odd! I am glad I did not guess him to be the genii of the place when Klint growled at him. But when you spoke this morning of Squire Treherne, I pictured him directly a middle-aged gentleman with grey hair and a red face, riding hard, and drinking hard, and all that sort of thing. Is he a friend of yours?"

Aunt Mary smiled at the idea of such a very grand and honoured personage being a friend; but she could say, and did, with much complacency, that he had always behaved in a very friendly manner, and so had his mother before him. "You see, she and I were married about the same time; and the late squire brought her home to Treherne just about a month after Uncle Joe had brought me home here. I remember, as if it were yesterday, the first time I saw her in church. Such a handsome

woman, with the most beautiful blue eyes, that just told you all she meant without her opening her lips. But for those eyes she would have been too cold and proud-looking for my taste. Yet for all her fine looks and clothes, and the admiration she excited, I would not have changed places with her."

Rachel had left off feeding Klint, and now leaning both elbows on the table, bent forward, her face all aglow with expectant interest. There was in Aunt Mary's voice a delicious tone of mystery, and she delighted in anything that sounded like a story. Then, too, as a rule, the topics of conversation started at that cosy tea-table were more prosy than suggestive, so that it was a double treat to be able to listen and attend.

"For all her grand air, and cold, proud smiles, and the company she kept, we all felt she was not happy; there was that in her smile even that told it you plainer than words."

“Why was she not happy? Did her husband not care for her?”

“Care for her! I should think he did; but she never cared for him; he was so different—small and thin, and shrunk up together, as I used to say. His face was handsome, though, and I liked him well enough when I got to know him, and pitied him too, somehow.”

“Why did she marry him?”

“Not for love. I did hear—but then a story is so easily made up—that she had a lover in the place from which she came, and for which her father was Member. A fine, strong, clever young fellow, but rough and independent in his ways, and not fit for her in any way, being only engineer in some large iron works. And she just worshipped the ground he trod on.”

“And would not marry him because of his position?”

“I was told that she would have made any sacrifice for him, proud though she was, and haughty, and disdainful in her manner

at times ; but perhaps he did not care for her, with all her beauty and gracious and winning ways to those she favoured. Or he may not have thought her a fit wife for a plain hard-working man——”

“Or they may have had a lover’s quarrel,” softly suggested Rachel.

“Well, anyhow he left the place, went to America or India, I don’t remember which ; and Miss Treherne married her cousin, the squire, who had been refused by her ever so often, and a pretty life she led him. His love for her never changed up to the last. He was just a fool about her. I am sure it quite hurt me sometimes to see how he would watch her every look and movement, listen for the sound of her voice, and actually turn pale if the beautiful blue eyes chanced to fall upon him. They ought never to have married ; they were too unlike to understand or be happy with each other. She so handsome and bright, and with such a spirit ; he so weak, poor man, and sickly, with his proud, distant manner, and low

voice, and small hands and feet, of which he was almost as proud as he was of her. Why, I have heard him myself boast of being able to wear his wife's boots and gloves. I have often wondered whether, if Mr. Carlton had taken more after his father, she would have doted on him as she did, for it was just his health and size and strength of which she was always boasting. How well I remember—and, dear me, how time flies! Why, it must be twenty-seven years ago if it's a day—when I was calling one afternoon at the Park, and Mr. Treherne—the late Squire Treherne—had rung to have a large heavy volume, which he could hardly lift, replaced in the library, that Mrs. Treherne turned sharply from him to the baby boy, who sat in his father's big leathern chair into which he had scrambled, and making him double up his little fist, kissed and fondled it, weighing it in her hand, and asking me, between laughing and crying, if her boy was not a little Samson, and the biggest and



strongest baby of his age that I had ever seen? And then she knelt down before him, and clasping the little sturdy arms round her neck, told him that he must grow up good and brave and strong, a man that a woman could love, and be proud of—  
Yes, dear, I am coming."

This was not said in answer to any call. No one had called Aunt Mary; but Uncle Joe had slipped quietly out. He was going his nightly round of inspection, and they never failed, had never failed since the first evening they had spent together, in the Cottage, now nearly thirty years ago, to traverse the little hall together, stand together at the garden-door, and exchange a remark upon the weather.

Rachel Raye, left to herself, turned to the uncouth but faithful friend at her side, took the big head into her soft little hands, kissed it with a quick, almost convulsive movement, and whispered, as the warm red blood leapt up into her face—

"We have behaved very badly to-day;

but it was all your fault. And mind, you're never again to lead me to that grey old house, or face to face with that tall, cross-looking man. Do you hear, sir?—never again ! ”

## CHAPTER III.

It was on record that on the eve of her wedding-day, Mrs. Lane, then Mary Wilkinson, when kissing Joseph Lane, for the last time as her lover, had whispered anxiously, "You won't be late at church, dear, will you?"

The needless question was never repeated; a few more hours had made them one, and from that day forth each knew the other could not be late for church, or indeed for anything else.

Five minutes before it was time to start they would be sitting or standing opposite each other, rather fussy and nervous until the five minutes had expired. He giving an extra rub to his hat, she an extra pull to

her gloves, which always somehow felt tighter of a Sunday than any other day.

Five minutes before the voluntary struck up they would be seated in their well-cushioned pew, and looking about them, not curiously, not even critically, but with a benign and placid smile that seemed to address the congregation generally—"Well, here we all are, once more assembled, with our prayer-books, and hymn-books, and best Sunday clothes—and very pleasant it is."

"I wonder how it would feel to be always smiling," was the wayward thought that passed through Rachel's mind as, seated at Aunt Mary's left, she caught the expression of the two faces that had grown to be so absurdly like each other. She, too, was looking about her, and both curiously and critically, it being her first Sunday at Didford.

It amused her to see so many new faces; for down at the Riverton rectory there was never anything new, except curates, and they were all exactly the same.

The voluntary struck up, and the brown eyes, as if ashamed of their wanderings, fixed themselves upon the painted chancel window, from which they dropped quickly on to the little black prayer-book that Rachel held ready open in her lap. But there was the soft sweep of silken skirts along the aisle, and two figures were passing slowly up. The first was that of a portly, middle-aged gentleman, a *gentleman* every inch of him, from the sole of his foot with its easy tread, firm and measured, to the crown of his head—a fine head, the grey hair and whiskers luxuriant, the features aquiline, the—— But now the second figure had passed within the range of the brown eyes—a girl's figure—so handsome, and, oh! so beautifully dressed. The rich trailing skirt of a warm, dark, uncertain colour, as was also the perfectly fitting velvet jacket; a dainty fabric of lace and feathers and flower, half hat, half bonnet; the delicate lace ruff and ruffles—the gloves—— All this was taken in at a

glance, as was also the faultless arrangement of the fair hair; the easy, erect walk, the pale, proud features. How enviable to be so fair, so well-dressed, so perfectly self-possessed; to be able to sweep yourself and trailing yards of silk into a narrow pew with a motion so stately and free from bustle! Very quietly the young lady dropped upon her knees, then rose as quietly, and the grave repose of her attitude made the owner of the brown eyes feel quite ashamed of her own wandering looks and thoughts. With a great effort she brought them back to the contemplation of the book in her lap. But, unfortunately, that same little black book had for years been the inspirer of her most idle fancies; for whenever the sermon was long and tedious—and Rachel's experience had, in that respect, been melancholy indeed—her eyes had but fell upon the familiar, rather shabby cover, for a host of memories, hopes, and dreams to be conjured up.

The voluntary ceased; the fair patrician

face that Rachel thought so handsome, bent with calm reverential looks over the ivory-bound prayer-book, and Rachel herself would, no doubt, have been quite as attentive, had not her eyes led her once more astray. It was not her fault that they fell upon another figure that, preceded by the beadle, was making its way to a seat—on tip-toe, with legs unnaturally bowed, and a more than natural suffusion of red over the face and neck.

Rachel tried hard to look unconscious and not to smile. She knew well enough what had brought Harry Barnett so far from home that Sunday morning, and why he had on that new gorgeous tie and those lavender gloves. Poor fellow! to be so smart and so shame-faced. How ridiculous it seemed!

“How is it,” she mused, half vexed, “that every man who comes in late to church walks as if he were treading on hot ploughshares; turns out his knees and turns in his toes; holds his hat as if it were a

live coal, and puts on such a stupid sheepish look. . Could he not walk as usual, and look as usual, though the reading-desk is filled and the aisle empty ? ”

As if in answer to the question, another male figure just then appeared—tall, erect, massive—passing along the aisle slowly, and with the most perfect unconcern. It was not the idle gaze of any number of eyes, brown or blue, critical or admiring, that would have made that proud head bend, or the firm, straight limbs take unnatural curves and angles. Past the reading-desk he went, and into the big, square pew, which belonged to Treherne Park.

No effort was now needed to bring back the truant eyes ; they dropped upon the little old book suddenly and effectually, and did not once rise throughout the service. How dare they, when the Treherne pew faced the congregation, and the girl, without looking up, could distinguish the outline of the manly figure at which Klint had growled ?

Had it come within the category of



human possibilities for a pair of naturally restless eyes to remain stationary throughout the wordy length of a discourse composed of three heads, each one more formidable than that of the ancient Gorgon, though that bred snakes and these only slippery, tortuous platitudes, Rachel's would not have wandered as they did at last, from the pulpit to the chancel window, from thence to the surpliced choir, and so on until they reached, in the natural course of their wanderings, the big square pew.

Other eyes were wandering too, the grey eyes that had once looked straight into hers. Up and down the aisle they had been travelling, slowly and indifferently, but were now resting with some complacency upon a fair, handsome face that, framed by the yellow hair and fairy bonnet, seemed to invite admiration. How long had he been watching the beautiful woman's face—and with what feelings? Rachel gave a little sigh when the man's eyes were quietly withdrawn and sent once more round the

church, cold and indifferent, until attracted by another girlish face, or rather by the strange look that lay in a pair of brown eyes, eager, intent, as if trying, by the mere force of magnetism, to draw his on to meet it.

Rachel was as little responsible for the eloquence of her eyes as for the ill-behaviour of her dog. She had seen the man's look riveted upon the face that had struck her as so handsome; and envying, poor child, the beauty that could thus attract, her eyes had remained unconsciously fixed upon his until, the look being returned, she awoke to the humiliating fact that she had been staring a gentleman out of countenance. If five years taken from her young life would have stopped in its course the blood that was mounting to her face in a crimson flood, how gladly would she just then have given them! To have five years less of youth—what was that? But to feel the little dark face getting redder and redder. It was horrible! Down went the

corners of the lips with a distressed quiver ; down, too, went the tell-tale eyes, not again to be raised ; no, not when the sermon was over, the blessing pronounced, and uncle and aunt, with their broad comfortable backs towards her, were ready to leave the pew.

"A very edifying sermon," Mrs. Lane observed, as soon as they were outside. She made that same observation regularly fifty-two times a year, as part of the Sunday's programme.

"Was that Squire Treherne ?" Rachel asked sharply, following out her own train of thought.

"The stout little gentleman with the bald head, who bowed just now ?"

As if the girl would have thought any stout, bald-headed little gentleman worth a look or question.

"No, the big man with the reddish moustache, who sat in the great square pew facing ours."

"That was Mr. Treherne."

“And the——” But her ear had caught once more the soft sweep of silken skirts, along the churchyard path this time. She turned. Close behind her she saw the portly middle-aged gentleman, with the showy hair and whiskers, and fine expressionless face; and beside him the stately girl’s figure, keeping all her fellow-worshippers at a respectful distance by the length of her train—all but one, who, more privileged than the rest, was walking with, and talking to her.

Outside the churchyard gates stood a very showy open carriage, much fitter for Hyde Park than steep country roads.

“The Grahams’ carriage,” whispered Mrs. Lane; and being *Conservative* to the backbone, endued with all proper respect for rank, fortune, and many another good thing not enjoyed by her humble self, she stood aside and flattened herself against the churchyard wall to allow of the elegant equipage dashing past her. She had to suffer for her principles; for when the roads

are muddy, carriage-wheels can't dash within half a yard of your person without leaving upon it some marks of their progress.

Very meekly Mrs. Lane wiped the mud from the large velvet mantle that had seen more summers than had the girl who swept herself and silken skirts with the same easy grace into the carriage as she had done into the pew ; and with feelings the reverse of meek, Rachel looked down at her new black silk dress, the first she had ever possessed, and which was to last her—— But how could her finite mind pierce the depths of a future where that silk dress was not ! Ever so many mud stains on it. It was too bad. She could have cried ; and it was long before she realized the possibility of remedying in any way the evil ; then drawing from her pocket a tiny square of cambric not yet unfolded, she sighed and hesitated.

“ This will do better, I think.”

With a violent start she looked up, to find the grey eyes that had already twice looked straight into hers, looking into them

again. He was laughing at her. Let him laugh! She threw back her head defiantly, and laughed too, revealing thereby any number of dimples, and a row of small white teeth, that gave a peculiarly childish character to both laugh and smile. At the same time she held out her hand for the proffered handkerchief, carefully and deliberately wiped the mud from her skirt, then returned it with a clear abrupt "Thank you," as she turned away.

"A queer little face, pretty enough when she laughs, something wild and untamed about it; very young, I should think; that long, thin figure could only be excusable in a girl in her teens, with a certain hope of its filling out. Not over well-mannered, and rather too free with her eyes—pretty brown eyes, though. I wonder where the Lanes picked her up."

That was how Carlton Treherne summed her up as he, too, turned away and joined the Rawdon's.

"Who was that pompous old gentleman

in the carriage?" Rachel asked, as soon as she found herself alone with the Lanes. It was easier to ask about the old gentleman than about the young lady who was so much handsomer and better dressed than herself.

"That was Sir John Graham, a connection of Mr. Treherne, and the young lady is his daughter. They only returned from abroad this spring. Mrs. Graham died at Nice last year, so Miss Graham was only presented this season. Her maid told our Jane all about it, and showed her the dress. She says——" But Rachel had heard quite enough about Miss Graham—she was beautiful, and rich, and everything else that was enviable; but what was all that to her—Rachel Raye? She turned the conversation. Mr. Treherne had joined a lady and gentleman, who were they? "Oh, only the village schoolmaster and his wife."

"The village schoolmaster! Why, he looks quite a gentleman."

"Well, in his Sunday clothes he does

look something like one, to be sure," assented Aunt Mary simply. "Not but what he is rather a superior sort of young man, and always was, or the late squire and Mrs. Treherne would not have favoured him as they did. He owes everything to them and Mr. Treherne himself. They had him taught with Mr. Carlton, who never cared for books, so they say; and afterwards, as he wasn't fit for much with his weak health and lameness, they got him the post of schoolmaster; and when he wanted to marry Miss Rivers, who was governess at the rectory, the present squire doubled his salary, and interested himself to get a model school and school-house built."

"He seems to have quite a mania for building. There is that big, ugly factory he built, or enlarged, and the queer little regiment of houses all along the river. He should have been born an architect." And Rachel laughed, saucily enough. Why should Aunt Mary assume that almost reverential tone when talking of the Tre-



hernes? What were they to her? The girl's face assumed a hard, almost resentful look, by no means becoming, then broke out suddenly into laughter and dimples, for Klint stood at the garden gate wagging his stump of a tail.

## CHAPTER IV.

MRS. LANE had said truly that John Rawdon owed everything to the Trehermes, for they had made of him what he was—the village schoolmaster, and honestly believed that they had done their best for him and placed him in the position for which, above all others, he was suited; and yet it was the secret grief of his life that they had not made of him something better. With their interest, and the talents that, owing to certain physical defects, could only be called forth by circumstances, they would not surely leave him on the dead level from which they had raised him of their own free will? This had been his one great hope. There was a time, indeed, when he had in-

dulged in dreams as ambitious almost as those of Carlton Treherne himself. It was the Treherne tutor under whom he had learnt so much, and the rightful pupil so little, who had taught him, amongst other things, to be ambitious.

“Why, Rawdon, we shall have you a bishop one of these days,” he had cried more than once, struck by the peasant boy’s great intellectual powers. “Of course the Trehernes mean to send you to college and get you a living, or they would not be giving you a classical education. That’s what comes of being lame, and of the same age as an idle young dog of an heir. Your fortune is made. You will be sent to college, carry off honours, get a curacy, preach eloquent sermons—for you only stammer because you’re nervous and diffident, and you’re too good-looking for the ladies not to cure you of that pretty soon; after the curacy will come the living, you will take to writing, and write yourself into the lawn-sleeves and apron.”

But Mr. Hooper's prophecy had not been fulfilled. The young squire—for he was already the squire, his father having died when he was quite a lad—had gone to college, of course, and carried off honours too, not only as one of its oars, but by excelling in many other athletic sports; and about that time, the post of village schoolmaster having become vacant, Carlton Treherne had laughingly remarked that it was the very thing for John. It was not worth much at that time, but Mrs. Treherne agreed that it would be a very good post for the young man; and having obtained it for him, was very cordial in her congratulations, and gracious in her acceptance of his thanks. Expressing them, John Rawdon turned very white, and stammered more than usual, while unconsciously his eyes sought hers with a look of almost agonized appeal; but no eyes were eloquent for her except those of her son, and her only answer to it had been a sweet patronizing smile. He was quite overcome, poor young

man, by the interest shown in him. She was glad to find him so grateful. And there for her the matter ended.

Happening to come across Carlton Treherne, when limping home through the park, he was again congratulated.

“The very thing for you, John. You are a regular bookworm, and don’t mind sitting still for hours. The school won’t know what to make of you after old Scrivens. We shall have all the little peasants Greek and Hebrew scholars.”

With these words and a hearty shake of the hand, he had strolled on, quite satisfied with the low, grave, “Thank you for having thought of me, Mr. Treherne,” and little guessing that that was the bitterest day of John Rawdon’s life; that the thought of stepping into old Scrivens’ shoes was hateful to him; that association with the coarse, rough natures with whom he would then be brought in daily contact was to his sensitive, highly nervous temperament, actual physical pain; the long rows

of dull boys' faces, the close atmosphere of the schoolroom, the subdued roar of harsh voices, a nightmare from which he already felt a feverish longing to escape. Had he not, as a sickly, fretful child, spent in that same bare schoolroom the long bright summer mornings and afternoons when every quivering nerve ached with his longing to be in the woods with grandfather, or alone with his own thoughts by the river side—and was that, the bitterest experience of his life, to be all lived over again? Were those four white-washed walls to enclose his future? Was it for that he had been taught so many great but now useless things, amongst others to hope, and dream?

John Rawdon would never forget that walk home, or the rebellious thoughts that rose up in bitter revolt against his fate. To accept it was to seal his own doom, and fix for ever between him and the future of his dreams the gulf that separates the class to which he belonged by birth and that to

which he belonged by education. He would not submit; he would leave Didford and seek his fortune elsewhere, work his way up, or die of starvation. Even that would be better than to live on when hope was dead. There was for him at that moment but the one alternative, to succeed or die. Then his heart gave a great leap, and the future lay before him, as he would make it for himself, and no other for him.

But he had reached his grandfather's cottage, and over the garden gate leant the melancholy remains of what had once been a magnificent figure, tall, grand, powerful, now gaunt and bent, with shaking head and limbs, and a face marred and haggard, but even so not repulsive, the long white beard and loose silvery locks giving to it a venerable, almost majestic appearance. It was Stephen Rawdon, ex-gamekeeper and old retainer of the Treherne family, and grandfather to John, the only creature in the world he had ever had to love, or who had ever loved him. His mother he could

not remember, and from his father, a hard, cold man, whom he had also lost when quite a lad, he had never received so much as a kind word or look. But the love of neither father nor mother had been missed, for Stephen had supplied the place of both. He had nursed him through his sickly childhood, cradled him on his broad breast, carried him for hours in his arms. His had been the only caresses the boy had ever known, and, drawn to him by the very infirmities for which others despised him, his touch would fall soft as that of a woman on the pretty bright head with its auburn curls, or the small soft hand that stole into his for protection. To the man with his giant frame and large, uncultivated mind, that frail bit of humanity, all nerve and intellect, with the large blue eyes, and plaintive voice and dreamy absent ways, had from the day he first came amongst them, when only three years old, been a constant source of wonder, and mingled pity and pride.



On the child's part the love had been as great, and the admiration unbounded. To be so tall, and big, and strong, how grand it was! How noble to be so strong, and yet so gentle to the weak! For years, faith in the old man had been the religion of his life. People said that Stephen Rawdon had taken to drink, that he was scarcely ever sober; but his grandson, who would have heard the truth soon enough had he mixed among the villagers, which he did not, never suspected it until one fine day the gamekeeper was unceremoniously turned out of his situation. Mrs. Treherne condescended to express a regret, but drunkenness was a vice too low to excite in her anything but disgust. It was from her lips that John Rawdon had first heard the truth.

After that he had kept closer than ever to the old man. He never reproached him; but when his utterance was thick and incoherent, he would look into his face with wistful, troubled eyes, and when his step reeled he would put out his frail, woman's

hand, as if to support the mighty but tottering frame. They were more together than ever, and John loved the old man as he had never loved him before, though faith in him was dead.

“Poor grandfather, he’s on the look-out for me,” he said to himself as he caught sight of old Stephen leaning on the garden gate, and saying it, his whole face softened and brightened into a smile. As he opened the gate he laid his hand with a caressing movement on the coarse sinewy fingers that shook as with palsy as they grasped a short clay pipe.

“Were you on the look-out for me, grandfather?”

“Ay, ay,” answered the poor old fellow vacantly. “I was on the look-out for ye.”

“I’ve been to Treherne. It’s fine walking across the park to-day.”

When addressing the peasant grandfather, and him only, the scholar would drop back insensibly into the tones and expressions of his ignorant childhood, habitual to him

when he had not yet learnt pure classical English from the Treherne tutor. It seemed somehow to bridge over the gulf that separated them. Why he should wish the gulf bridged over, or how he could still be so fond of the disreputable old fellow who had disgraced him, was a mystery to many, to Carlton Treherne more especially. He had even strongly recommended his being sent to one of the model almshouses that, having lately built at no little expense, he was naturally anxious to fill. For almshouses, particularly model ones, don't fill as readily as do public-houses. But John Rawdon did not see that any vice, however degrading, could cancel the devotion of years; and so, thanking Mr. Treherne for his good advice, he had answered simply, that no place would be home to him without grandfather—that he could not spare him, he would miss him too much. And to himself he had said—that no sacrifice would be too great when made as a return for so much love. On that bright summer

afternoon when he laid his hand upon the old man's arm and looked him in the face, he had proved the truth of his words, for he had sacrificed to him more than his life—his future. If he went forth, it must be alone.

"Ay, ay," old Stephen was repeating, in his dull, blank way, for his memory was much impaired, and he could not grasp more than one idea at a time. "Ay, ay, I was on the look-out for ye."

"I was up at Treherne. Old Scrivens is dead, you know; and they have offered me the post of village schoolmaster."

"Ay, ay, Johnny, that's fine, that's fine."

"There's the salary, grandfather"—very slowly and distinctly, as if the explanation cost him an effort; "and the cottage, and coals, and a present from the Trehernes at Christmas. They won't do less for me than for old Scrivens. We shan't starve upon what they give us. And there'll be a home for you, grand-dad"—he had not called him so since his childhood—"a home where we

can keep together. Oh, grandfather!" And throwing his arms round the old man's neck, and hiding his face on the broad breast that had for years been his shelter in moments of grief or passion, he had sobbed out there his despair and resignation.

In less than a month he had taken possession of the school and quaint, damp, moss-grown cottage thereto belonging. For two years he had lived a patient, solitary life, and then Agatha Rivers had come to brighten it. Her love had done that long before the doubling of his salary and the building of the model school and school-house enabled him to marry. That he owed the higher salary and model buildings to the penniless little wife, was a secret known only to herself and one more—that other Carlton Treherne, who had been her admirer, if not her lover, in the old happy days when she was the rector's daughter and he one of a party of sportsmen who had met at Gorsford Park for partridge-shooting. Being himself of a rough, rude type, power-

ful and strong, the pretty little country girl, with her shy looks, soft and womanly, dropping from his face almost before they had reached it, and delicate features that would have been perfectly classical but for the round, rosy oval of the bright face, had at once struck his fancy.

He never said, even to himself, that he was in love with her; it was not his way to put feelings into words; but he felt something like triumph every time he forced the shy eyes to meet his, and there is little doubt that had she raised them oftener, and higher, she might have turned the meek Madonna face to good account.

Between their first meeting and the next, many things had happened; the rector had died, leaving Agatha destitute; Mrs. Treharne, too, had died, and the young squire, by way of consolation, had joined an Arctic expedition and visited the North Pole. After a time she went as governess to the Didford rectory, and he returned home.

They did not often meet, of course, but he

saw her every Sunday in church, and the more he looked at the pale, meek face, the more it had attracted him. It was purely classical now, for sorrow had come, and the roundness and freshness and brightness of early youth had gone for ever.

It was a pity that, faithful to her old trick, she never raised her eyes from her prayer-book, or she would surely have been grateful for the look of interest that lay in the usually cold grey eyes. Other eyes there were, beautiful blue eyes, that, being more on a level with her own, she met one day quite by chance at the Sunday-school, and something in them, to which she gave no name, made her somehow feel less lonely.

It was a "midsummer day's dream," and the old story over again. Whilst Carlton Treherne, who prided himself upon his liberalism, and was on the look-out for an occasion to prove it, was watching with growing interest the Madonna face so pretty and innocent-looking in its heavy framework of crape, the little governess, having never

ventured to look higher than his moustache, which, though often the most telling part of a man's face, is not the most expressive, was dreaming of another, and that other the lame schoolmaster.

There was no one to tell her that the dream was madness, that John Rawdon, deformed, sickly, meanly born, without even a respectable home to offer any woman, hampered as he was with the disreputable old grandfather, was no fit object for her love or longing; and her heart told a very different tale. It said nothing about the man's position, it only spoke of him—of the beautiful blue eyes that haunted her solitude, and made it pleasant—of the low musical voice, and the bright wealth of curl so much more precious to her woman's heart than the wealth of gold that with all its glitter leaves the heart cold.

Miss Rivers was very young, and romantic, and imprudent, and passionately in love with an ideal. There is no reasoning against such folly. She admired him all



the more for being lame, loved him all the better for being poor ; and when she thought of sharing his loneliness, his privations, his care of the imbecile old grandfather, her heart would overflow, and her eyes too, for very joy and longing.

At first it had been happiness enough to the orphan girl to feel that she was not alone in the world ; a look from the blue eyes made her glad, and of every kind word she made a prayer and a thanksgiving.

But as in the law of nature there can be no standing still, not even for two such mean, insignificant people as the school-master and his sweetheart, to casual looks and words had succeeded meetings that would have set Mrs. Rector's hair on end with righteous indignation, but which to Agatha were only strange and beautiful, and so much the more sacred for being secret and stolen. To be alone with him—how like a dream ! To feel the contact of his immediate presence, the touch of his hand, to hear him talk of himself—what a privilege !

Marriage being the proper and legitimate end of all love-making, the day came when the girl was asked whether she would make the sacrifice of her young life for the sake of the man she loved; whether she would give up all hope of a brighter future, and leaving her own class, with all its prejudices, be content to enter his? And thinking of the man only, and not his position, her answer had been a proud, unhesitating "Yes." Would she wait for him, perhaps for years, and give him a hope to live for? To this, too, she had answered "Yes"; but the waiting was the hardest part of all, because of her longing to go to him and make him happy.

One day after a stolen meeting, when looking into his face with passionate yearning, it had struck her as sharper and more careworn than usual, this longing had set her crying and sobbing bitterly.

She stood on the little rustic bridge in the Treherne wood, their usual trysting-place, where he had just left her; the late autumn

wind, moaning dismally through the almost leafless branches, was telling her of the coming winter. If only she could meet it with him! How long, how dreary it would seem to both, apart! She turned and found herself face to face with the master of Treherne. He gave her no chance of escape, for her hand was taken at once into the firm strong grasp, so much stronger to keep and protect than the frail, feverish clasp of that other hand to which she had entrusted her life.

Poor child! what was the matter? Was she in trouble? Had any one been ill-using her?

How Agatha, who had never as yet dared even raise her eyes to a level with his, now took courage to speak as she did was ever afterwards a mystery to herself. Perhaps her woman's instinct told her that that man, and he alone, could help them if he would. Anyhow, there will always be a strange sympathy between a woman and the man who is fond of her. Agatha could

not escape, for the strong grasp held her fast ; and as he was waiting for an answer, she told him the truth.

Under the circumstances, Squire Treherne behaved better than might have been expected. He did not even say, as he was very much tempted to do : " Why, girl, you are a fool ; the man's life is not worth a thought, unless insured ; and in winning your love, when he had nothing but shame and poverty to offer in exchange, he has acted a selfish and dishonourable part." Had he felt less he might have said more ; but, at any rate, he sent her home comforted.

After that he ceased to watch the little Madonna face, set off by its interesting framework of crape ; but he did what was far better—he doubled the schoolmaster's salary, and used his influence to get a model school and school-house built.

John Rawdon, having a home to offer Agatha Rivers, married her, never guessing how near she had been to the summit of

the social pinnacle, the toilsome and giddy ascent of which constitutes the life of most of us. It was the feeble clasp of his hand that had kept her at its base ; and her eyes, upturned to his face, had rested there, and not cared to look higher.

All this was quite a thing of the past to Mr. and Mrs. Rawdon, who looked upon themselves as an old married couple. Five years lay between their wedding-day and Rachel's first Sunday at Didford—five years, and two tiny coffins.

## CHAPTER V.

It was eleven o'clock, a.m. You might have sworn to it in a court of justice, for the Cottage clocks were all striking simultaneously, and those clocks were punctuality itself.

As everything in the Cottage went by clock-work, not a member of the household but could at that particular hour have given a ready and satisfactory account of his or her doings; the very same thing being done at the very same hour, daily. The cook in the kitchen. Jane in the pantry. Mrs. Lane, it being Monday, and eleven o'clock, at the linen-press. And her niece Rachel? Well, Rachel was only a visitor, and not, alas! gifted with her

aunt's methodical mind. She rather liked helping in the kitchen when anything interesting was going on; she had a decided taste for dairy work, and could churn for five minutes at a time—but a linen-press—the very sight of it made her shudder! She knew that a visit to *that* meant *darning*. They had one at the Riverton rectory, and she was not treated as a visitor there, which was rather hard upon her, she argued; for she was only staying with them until her father came back from India, or sent for her. It was so nice to be a visitor and not have to darn. She would help Aunt Mary some other way.

“Aunty, shall I pick fresh flowers for the drawing-room?”

She put the question from a safe distance, being only half-way up the stairs. She was not afraid of her services being perforce enlisted, but a linen-press possessed for her all the horrors of Bluebeard's chamber—she would rather not look into it.

Mrs. Lane always made the drawing-

room nosegays of a Saturday, at three, p.m. Two plump, dumpy little erections that were so exactly like herself, Rachel had observed, rather irreverently, that they were better than any photo.

"I put fresh flowers in the drawing-room on Saturday, dear, and they always last a week."

"Then I'll arrange some for the tea-table."

A tea-table, adorned with a real silver urn and teapot, could need no other embellishment, Mrs. Lane thought. But what she said was lost in the shadowy depths of that mystic press; and Rachel, who liked to be useful her own way, and to have her own way too, went whistling and humming among the beds, grouping together leaf and bud until a bouquet was made.

"That's how flowers should be treated"—holding it up in triumph—"just like human beings, allowed to go their own way, and not be cramped and dwarfed and distorted until nothing of nature and beauty is left



in them. The flowers that compose poor aunty's nosegays and this are the same—but how different they look!"

Rachel, whilst admiring her handiwork, was still moralizing upon the wickedness and absurdity of curbing the natural will, of young ladies in their teens more especially, instead of letting them run wild, and be charming and happy their own way. Why should you be made to sew when it hurts your fingers and makes your back ache? Why should you be expected to teach your little nephews and nieces just because your aunt has a baby every year? Why should it be thought wrong to like horses and dogs? Ah! by-the-by, where was her dog—the dog that had got her into so many more scrapes than she had ever got herself into?

Wild visions rose before her of Klint in mischief; Klint attacking a brood of young chickens, or the legs of a butcher-boy; or in mortal conflict with some vulgar butcher's dog. For if there were two things that

roused his evil passions more than any other, they were a butcher-boy's legs and his dog; and many an ugly scar, tending rather to his disfigurement than glory, told of sanguinary conflicts in which he had been engaged. Half his tail and nearly all one ear he had sacrificed to an idle prejudice—for, after all, butcher-boys and their dogs are not worse than others of their kind.

Klint was not to be trusted; he must be looked for. With a last admiring look Rachel set the vase down on the hall-table, and opening the door in the brusque, wild way in which she did most things when not under restraint, found herself in close proximity to a tall, broad-shouldered, well-dressed gentleman with a moustache—the gentleman at whom Klint had dared to growl, who had stared so long and so admiringly at Miss Graham, who had lent her, Rachel, his handkerchief to wipe the precious silk skirt—the mention of whose name by Aunt Mary she had more than

once resented. She hoped he did not remember about the growl and handkerchief!

He bowed; hardly as he would have done had she been Miss Graham, or his cousin, Lady Blanche Verner—indeed, the bow partook somewhat of the character of a nod; but Rachel, who did not know what it was to be treated like an earl's or baronet's daughter, did not resent the careless greeting.

“Could I see Mr. Lane? Is he at home?”

Had she been Jane, the housemaid, the question could not have been put in a tone of more easy unconcern. Of course, Uncle Joe was not at home, she knew that perfectly well, having herself tucked him into the little pony-chaise, and seen him off for Bletchworthy, where he was superintending the building of some houses; for though he had ostensibly retired from business (he was an architect, and much respected and thought of in the place),

he did a little every now and then to oblige a friend. But whether it was that the combined thought of the growl and handkerchief had confused her, or that, for some inexplicable reason, she did not wish Mr. Treherne to turn on his heel and walk off, she did not give a direct answer, but with a very demure look suggested calling Aunt Mary. Jane, happening to pass was, forthwith despatched to the linen-press, and the young lady ushered the visitor into the drawing-room.

He passed in, and walked straight up to the window, taking no further notice of her; and this she did resent. Only the day before, as a perfect stranger, without introduction, he had suddenly and uncere- moniously addressed her, and now he ignored her; actually turned his back upon her. His visit was not to her, certainly, but as she happened to be there, he might as well speak to her.

With a faint, uncomfortable beating at her heart, she sat down and waited.

Though he evidently did not see her, she could see him, and having the happy faculty of deriving amusement from whatever was going on around her, she now amused herself by watching him, as he would not talk to her. She thought—she had thought it once before—that the half-averted face, though not handsome, would be an interesting one to watch ; so full of power, energy, and will. Turning sharply round, the owner of the face caught, for the second time, her look, intent and questioning, and was rather taken aback by it ; all the more so as he had believed himself alone in the room.

The position was an embarrassing one ; but just then Mrs. Lane appeared, rather flurried at having been called away from the sheets and table-cloths, but looking pleased and motherly, and running over with excuses and lamentations at his having been kept waiting, and at Mr. Lane being from home.

“ He will be so sorry, Mr. Treherne—that

he will, I'm sure ; but if I could give a message—or he could wait upon you. To think you should have troubled to call here for nothing.”

The colour on a certain little brown cheek was deepening, and a certain pair of brown eyes were beginning to flash. Why should Aunt Mary make so many absurd excuses, and why did not Mr. Treherne cut them short instead of accepting them all as his due ?

When Mrs. Lane paused at length, only for want of breath, being asthmatic, he condescended to explain that he had wished to consult her husband about some cottages he was building. He stood by the door, not intending evidently to waste more of his time upon them.

“ And shall we see you at our games this year ; you, and Mr. Lane, and Miss—— ” He had been told the girl's name the day before, but had forgotten it.

“ My niece Rachel,” supplemented the aunt.

"Raye," added the niece.

"Miss Rachel Raye," he repeated, with provoking deliberation, and a most provoking smile.

"We shall be delighted to come; so kind of you to think of us; such a treat for us all, to be sure."

Deeper yet the colour burnt in the little brown cheek, and the light in the bronze-brown eyes. Why should the one say so much, and the other so little? And what was there in his manner, brusque and off-hand, that jarred upon her so painfully? Was it natural to him, or—— He had given Mrs. Lane's plump, eagerly outstretched hand a friendly shake, for which her smile thanked him if her lips did not; and now, either because he thought that the niece should be treated as a friend, or a child, was holding out his hand to her.

She had risen and stood before him, slight, erect; the little brown head—it looked so very brown with the bright morn-

ing sun full upon it—very erect indeed. Slowly, almost reluctantly it seemed, her hand went out to meet his; a small hand, brown, and rather thin, but soft as satin to the touch.

Something in her attitude, her face, the touch of her hand must have struck him, for more than once that day she appeared vividly before him as she had stood then, her head thrown back, her eyes rather averted than downcast, and on her cheek a flush that was something more than a mere girlish blush.

“A queer face, certainly,” he decided; “but *not only pretty when she laughs.*”

Mrs. Lane having seen him out, returned to the drawing-room, and renewed her expressions of regret at Uncle Joe just happening to be from home when the squire called.

Rachel said nothing; she and Klint stood at the window looking out. What they found to look at so intently was best known to themselves. Once Klint growled, as if he had caught sight of some objectionable



object, but Rachel silenced him, and they continued to look out.

When she turned at last, it was with a little sigh.

“What did he mean by games?”

Rachel little guessed what the simple question would entail upon her. Aunt Mary was in a delightful flutter of excitement. When it subsided, she would return to the bed and table linen; in the meanwhile she talked.

“My dear, there never was such a master as Mr. Treherne, more especially to the men he employs in those works across the river. The late squire just hated the sight of the place, and never went near it—said the noise made him giddy, and the smell and heat faint. He would have sold it over and over again but for Mr. Carlton. It was always a hobby of his; and Mrs. Treherne took an interest in it, because he did. They built new shops, and those model cottages you saw; and when he found that the men, and even boys, spent most of their spare

time in the public-houses, he took ever so much trouble to find them amusement ; he built them a reading-room, and got up a club where they talk a lot and don't do much harm, for the tongue doesn't wear out as easily as the coats of the stomach."

"But the games, auntie?" impatiently.

"Yes, dear, the games, to be sure," in a tone of mild acquiescence. Then, sinking her voice, "I have heard him called a *Radical*, but no Treherne could ever be that—meaning strikes and Hyde Park meetings, and treason against her Majesty and all the Royal Family, which he would never encourage, being too much of a gentleman ; though he does talk so beautifully at public meetings, so Uncle Joe says, about the fellowship that exists between one class and another, and every upright, honest man being the equal of himself or any one else, which is a great condescension on his part —"

"And the games?" despairingly.

"Yes, dear, the games ; and a great deal

of good they do, keeping the young men steady and respectable. Mr. Treherne said at one of their club meetings that it was a shame to see so many strong, fine young fellows dividing their strength between the master who pays and the publican who robs them. And it wasn't all talk neither, as is the way with some, for he gave them a large piece of ground at the further end of the park, and there the games are held every year, and handsome prizes given, and most of the county families attend to please the squire; and a very fine thing it is, no doubt, but uncommon hot—at least, I find it so looking on, not to speak of the nervousness of seeing the poor fellows lift and throw heavy weights, and twist their bodies about, and run and leap like so many grasshoppers, that you just wonder when they will come down—but, of course, we always go every year regularly."

"Why?" with some asperity.

Mrs. Lane's look was eloquent of mingled surprise and reproach. "When Mr. Tre-

herne has the kindness to ask us! Next Thursday was the day he mentioned, wasn't it? We'll have Toby clipped, and the harness rubbed up. There's my violet silk dress"—musingly—"Yes, Jane, I'm coming," as a head appeared at the door—"and my chip bonnet——"

Exit Mrs. Lane, leaving Rachel still standing at the window, but no longer looking at anything in particular. "A radical—he a *radical*—what nonsense! Professes to look upon every honest man as his equal. Does he treat his footman as such? or even dear old Uncle Joe?—as honest an old proser as ever lived. It's easy enough to tell a man, or any number of men, that they are your equals, when there is no fear of their taking advantage of the concession; when they are as morally convinced of the contrary as you are yourself; when they imbibed the cream of your superiority with their mother's milk, and could not see in you an equal if they tried."

Rachel had never, until within the last

week, had any political opinions, or any clear idea of social distinctions; it had come to her suddenly like a revelation, her deductions drawn from the proud carriage of a certain rather large curly head, the look that lay in a pair of grey eyes, the tone of a not unpleasant voice.

“Why, Klint, you stupid old thing, what are you looking at so intently, when there is not a bird or even an insect to be seen? Are you not tired of thinking? I am.”

She left him to his meditations; sat down to the piano and dashed off half a dozen vales; regretted that she was not going to a ball instead of those stupid games; rose abruptly, took a pale, cream-tinted rose from a specimen glass, in which she had herself placed it the day before, put it in the bosom of her dress, resumed her seat; sang “Robin Adair” in a clear rich voice, and with much feeling; broke off suddenly, and dashed out of the room and down the stairs and into the kitchen. Aunt Mary not there, nor in the storeroom—and every

moment so precious. Ah ! there she was, placid and smiling as usual. "Oh—  
auntie"—gasping for breath—"my pretty new muslin ! "

"Eh, dear ? "

"My muslin—and the games—and—and that tiresome croquet-party."

"Well, dear ? "

"I got it quite soiled, you know ; and I must have it for the games—and there are only two days."

"Could you not wear your black silk, dear ? "

"It's so dark"—with a little pout—"and not half as becoming as the white muslin, with the pretty blue bows and sash."

"If you wore the blue sash with the black silk ? " suggestively.

"Horrid !" with great emphasis, and a very decided shake of the little brown head. "Just like a shop-girl, or a Sunday-school teacher, auntie," in a slow, impressive tone. "I must have the muslin for Thursday, or—I won't go."

That decided the question. "Not go, when Mr. Treherne was so good as to ask you; actually mentioned you by name? The dress *must* be got up for Thursday."

Rachel went back to Klint and the piano, but did not finish the lament for Robin Adair.

## CHAPTER VI.

RACHEL RAYE was not the only one who wished to look her very best at the Treherne games ; another girl, two or three years her senior, and who should therefore have known better, was possessed with the same wish, the only difference between the two being, that, whereas Rachel was indulging a mere idle, aimless whim, Evelyn Graham had a particular object in view—to please the master of Treherne. It was not a passionate feeling, certainly—of that Miss Graham was altogether incapable ; but it was as certainly the one desire of her heart just then, and if she hardly threw as much of eagerness into it as did Rachel into the thought of the white muslin dress, that was



merely owing to the difference of character. Miss Graham admired Treherne; she admired its owner too, and respected him. Of a placid, domestic nature, her one idea was to settle advantageously, which, she was sensible enough to realize, was no easy matter. The life abroad had wearied, but had not spoilt her; the adulation of foreigners she had returned by the most sovereign contempt. Frenchmen had adored, Italians serenaded, German counts proposed; but for her, all Frenchmen were mountebanks, Italians madmen, and German counts impostors. *Elle est si Anglaise* had been the unanimous verdict, with a despairing shrug of the shoulders.

The first London season, though entered upon under the most favourable auspices, had not somehow proved as great a success as she and her admirers had confidently expected; modest worth and white shoulders were at a low premium, unfortunately; the fast young ladies were the fashion, and had it all their own way. The gentlemen

found it rare fun talking slang, discussing the points of a racer and merits of a bull-pup with a "capital fellow" in a petticoat, a jacket as near an imitation of their own as could be, a stand-up collar, a coquettish little tie, a pretty girlish face, maybe, and a cheek as incapable of a blush as the heart of anything like timidity or reserve. Well, fashion is everything, after all. Patches were the fashion at one time; rouge, artificial, and natural at another. There is no knowing to what we may come, so it is as well to take things as they are, and be thankful that they are no worse.

Fast young ladies being the fashion, and Evelyn Graham being, as said her detractors, so lamentably the reverse, she did not make any particular sensation, handsome though she was acknowledged to be; and she was all the more ready, therefore, to admire Treherne and its stately master (whom she had already met abroad, seen once or twice in London, besides having known him as a child), and think no better

thing could be granted to her life than to be his mistress and his wife. Hence the wish to look her very best at the games—and that she would look remarkably well there could be little doubt; an elegant London costume, a magnificent figure, a perfect complexion, and the wish to please!

When on that particular Saturday she was awakened at a fashionably late hour—awaking was never with Miss Graham a natural process—and saw the sun streaming in through the lace curtains, she was glad to find the day in keeping with her dress, which was light and bright, and would not certainly have shown to such advantage in dull weather.

Rachel had been up at least three hours before, and out among the flowers, while the dew still lay heavy upon them. She was at all times an early riser, and those first hours of the day might be reckoned among the happiest of her life. To be alone, and yet not feel lonely, that was so pleasant! To have a good scamper with

Klint, and then stand breathless at the garden gate, looking down the road over which lay a solemn mystery of silence, and mist, and peace—it was glorious!

Not a sound astir as yet; then the distant rumbling of a cart, that made her heart beat as at something unreal or unnatural; then the far-off barking of a dog, and the straining of the eager eyes to distinguish the moving mass looming dimly from out the mist. A flock of sheep, quite apparent now, for the mist had vanished, as if by enchantment, from the higher ground at least; down in the valley it still lay soft and grey, but the hill was all aglow with the crimson glory of the sky.

“Oh, Klint, isn’t it glorious?” Rachel breathed very softly, and with hands clasped for very ecstasy. A backward look at the house standing so white and drowsy among the trees, a toss of the little head that spoke volumes, a moment’s pause—and she was speeding along the road, Klint at her heels.

"I must go. I must have it all to myself just this once. There will be no one to see me, no one for Klint to growl at—we shall have it all to ourselves ; but we must make haste."

And faster still she ran, until, the fields crossed, she stood on the bridge that, spanning the river, led into the Treherne woods and park. Over it she went, dancing and singing, excited by the freshness of the morning air ; by the prospect of the afternoon games ; by the consciousness of having played truant ; by a new, strange feeling, nameless and altogether delightful, that sent every now and then a thrill through her heart, and seemed to mount to her brain with a sense of intoxication. Oh that delicious morning air—that wild, delicious feeling !

A stile led into the wood ; on the top of it she perched herself. "Klint," she said, taking the dog as she always did into her confidence, "we are trespassers again—liable to be prosecuted ; but we shan't be found

out. The place might be a desert island, where there is no one but ourselves to enjoy it. We are quite alone."

Higher the sun was mounting, breaking through cloud and mist, and the river that lay beneath its beams glowed and sparkled, reflecting its living light; far as the eye could reach lay piled the golden and purple mass of clouds. Her eyes uplifted to them, Rachel thought of the morning hymn she had taught the little ones at the rectory, and almost unconsciously she sang it now, softly and to herself, as it were, the singing of the birds in the wood rising clear and shrill above the low, solemn chant.

"Good morning, Miss Raye."

She started to her feet; then, as if the presence of an intruder were a matter of perfect indifference to her, though there was not another in the wide world she would not rather have stood face to face with at that moment, she quietly resumed her seat, and as quietly returned the greeting. The spirit of contradiction was strong

in the girl at all times. The thought of meeting Mr. Treherne, and on his own ground, too, would have made her heart beat ever so fast ; now that he stood before her she felt perfectly calm and self-possessed, rather inclined to show her teeth and dimples than any signs of embarrassment.

“ I am on the look-out for my steward,” Carlton Treherne remarked, as if in apology for his intrusion. “ He is off to London for me, and I wish to catch him on his way to the station. You are an early riser, I see.”

“ The early bird gets the worm,” Rachel answered demurely.

“ And the worm who is earlier still gets caught—two rather different applications of the proverb, that of the bird and the worm.”

“ Then I am rather the worm than the bird, as I have been caught,” laughed Rachel, who was decidedly pert, and set down by many as sadly deficient in manner. “ My idea of early rising has always been

solitude; it is the only hour of the day when you can reckon upon being alone."

"With exceptions to the rule," added Squire Treherne, in a queer tone, and with a queer look in the eyes that were trying to meet hers.

Why Rachel should take the remark amiss she could not herself have explained; something in the look or tone perhaps made it sound like a reproach, and thus jarred upon her. It was certainly not he who had intruded upon her solitude, but she upon his. He had reserved to himself that particular corner of the park, and she had twice intruded upon him there. Was he angry with her? The question was not put to herself in meekness—very far from it; the hot rebellious blood was burning in her cheeks, and the strange light that his words seemed fated to call up in her eyes was lying in them, dark and stormy.

"I so wished to see once more the view from that great oak down the valley, and I thought that by going very early I should



be sure not to disturb you," she said, the words, rapid and childishly eager, belying the stormy flash of her eyes.

"It is a mistake ever to make too sure of anything," was the careless answer. "You are welcome to walk in this or any other corner of the park at all hours, only I cannot promise that you will have it to yourself."

This was said not kindly or encouragingly, but as if he meant just what he said, and no more; his eyes the while were on her face with a look she did not care to meet, and which made her heart beat with resentment.

"You are, of course, coming to our games this afternoon?" this after watching her for some time in silence.

Quick to seize every impression, she answered as readily as if he had done nothing to vex her, and her face, uplifted to his, said even more than her words. After that they got on very well together. When he expressed surprise at not having seen

her before at Didford, she told him of the many years spent in India, and spoke of her father, who, according to her, was the noblest of men. "So clever, so good," she assured him with bright, moist eyes that sought his as if for sympathy. "He's a civil engineer, you know, and so devoted to his work. He's now inventing something that is to make his fortune, uncle says ; but it takes all his time and money. I wish he would make haste and finish it, and come and live in England, as he promises to do ;" and the brown eyes, moist still, grew wistful and troubled.

"And you have left school, and will live here till his return, eh ?" At first Carlton Treherne had rather let her talk than encouraged her to do so ; but there was a strong fascination in her eyes when they rested upon him, and these, more perhaps than her words, had succeeded in arresting his attention.

"Oh no !" Again the dimples showed to advantage, and the small white teeth,

with the gum, pink as coral, above them, as she told him of the rectory and the rectory babies; of the old parish women who were under her care; to say nothing of the parish boys, whom she always chose at Sunday-school in preference to the girls, they being so much nicer and more manageable—at which Mr. Treherne smiled incredulously, and she had to enter into the subject more fully, and waxed quite warm in defence of boys in general, and her own in particular.

Just then came the sound of wheels along the lane. “The person you were expecting,” she said, breaking off suddenly. She rose to go; but he stopped her in the quick, imperious tone that had so excited her the day before; it excited her now, too, a little, but not unpleasantly.

“Wait here; I shall be back directly.”

And she did wait quite contentedly, and watched him as he crossed the field with long, easy strides, and with more interest still as he stood by the gig talking to the steward. Watching him, she remembered

what Aunt Mary had told her of his mother, and she said to herself, "I don't wonder at her being so fond of him if—he loved her." Even then she allowed him to be worthy of a woman's love—but conditionally only.

The gig having driven on, he re-crossed the fields, but more slowly, and evidently lost in thought; the lane reached, he even turned mechanically in the direction of home. The brown eyes, watching him so eagerly, opened very wide. He had forgotten her presence, forgotten his expressed wish that she should wait for him. Half vexed, half amused, but wholly bent upon bringing him back to her side now that she had waited according to his command, she paused one moment, then gave a low, sharp whistle. Her object was gained; he looked up, and turned back at once.

"You told me to wait," she said, as if in excuse for the whistle, and her lids drooped before the look she had caught upon his face. He laughed. It was a novel mode of attracting notice, certainly—rather daring

in a young lady, and by no means commendable—but it was amusing from its originality, and he was quite content to be amused by the girl without criticizing her actions too closely. He was Squire Treherne, she the Lanes' queer little stranger niece. She might wander abroad at unnaturally early hours, perch herself on the tops of stiles, sing, whistle, display her teeth and dimples to any chance passer by, he would not find fault. She amused him for the time, and the brown wealth of her hair—he was quick to notice every feminine beauty, and to dwell on it complacently—the velvet brown of her eyes; the flood of crimson colour that came and went so tantalizingly, flushing her face into beauty one moment to leave it almost plain the next; the easy, graceful motions of the figure that he still pronounced far too thin for everything but grace—all this pleased him as a novelty; he had never before met a woman like her, and whilst her manners repelled, her appearance attracted him.

"If you would like to see the view from the oak, I will take you to it."

He spoke more gently, for the feeling of disapprobation that had, he knew, risen up in his heart against her.

Happily unconscious of any such feeling, she gladly accepted his offer, and during the walk through the wood, eager and excited, she did all the talking, which suited her companion exactly. He did not care in general for the society of women, and in his daily life he mixed with them but little; all the more pleasantly then fell on his ear the ringing girlish voice, no matter what it uttered, sense or nonsense.

They had soon—too soon Rachel thought—reached the giant oak. Standing beneath it, she cast a rapid glance around, taking in every point of the view.

"Well, are you satisfied?" he asked, bending a curious look upon her face. He wondered what she saw there to make her cheek flush, her lips part, her eyes kindle. It was a favourite spot of his, because it

was shady and cool, and lonely ; but what was there in it to attract a stranger's eye ?

Her only answer to his question was a bright smile and quick, decided little nod.

"There's many a finer view to be got from the park."

"But not one more lovable."

He smiled and shrugged his shoulders. "You believe the admirable and the lovable to be quite distinct, then ?"

"Quite distinct. So do you."

She let her eyes rest awhile upon him, their expression changing wonderfully. He did not care to pursue the subject further, more especially as, having withdrawn her eyes, she turned abruptly to go.

"And you understand," he said at parting, as, having helped her over the stile, he still held her hand by way of good-bye, "that there is free admittance for you into the park, into every corner of it, and at all hours."

"Thank you," she answered very quietly

and softly, but without the upturned grateful look he had expected.

“I have put my foot into it now,” was his mental reflection as he turned towards home. “In all places, and at all hours—that will suit her exactly, but me less so. Fortunately, she will soon be going back to her parish boys and old parish women, and meanwhile I can avoid her when I choose—and when I choose I can amuse myself with her,” was another thought that floated vaguely through his mind.

It was something in her favour that she was even deemed worthy to amuse him.



## CHAPTER VII.

THE pony-carriage stood before the door, and the plump little pony was submitting patiently to be patted and rubbed down by his plump little master and mistress, one on each side. "Don't you think," observed the latter anxiously, "that he's looking just a little thinner?"

"Well, he's had more to do lately, you see, and Rachel—I am afraid she drives him rather fast sometimes; he's not accustomed to it."

That Rachel should have been allowed to drive him at all was a wonder to every one but herself. Asking would never have done it; but when she fairly took the reins out of Uncle Joe's hand, and looked very wilful and determined, and then, her object gained,

very happy and triumphant, what could he do but submit? Of course, she was as sure of getting her own way with the good old people as with the rectory babies; and more so—for babies will kick; whereas *they* were quite incapable of any stronger expression of feeling than a mild admonitory shake of the head.

The garden-gate swung open and then to, and Rachel appeared, in the muslin dress and pretty blue bows, and a large Leghorn hat, trimmed with black velvet and corn-flowers. Both dress and hat became her well, as what would not at that moment, all aglow as she was with eager expectation? She had made the most of her hair, covering the little head with bright, soft coils, and she had arranged a dainty bouquet for her waistband; altogether she felt that she had done the very best she could for herself, and being of a naturally contented nature, was tolerably well satisfied with the result.

“Here I am, auntie, and I am going to drive; uncle can sit behind.”

“ But, my dear—— ”

“ How smart Toby looks now he’s clipped, and in his new harness ! I *must* drive him. I shall feel so proud, you know ! ”

“ But there’ll be such a crowd, dear.”

“ Then if I hold the reins uncle will be all ready to jump down and hold Toby’s head in case of need.”

This was not all or half Rachel said before the matter was settled ; but settled it was at last, to her satisfaction, and as Uncle Joe seated himself behind, she threw him back a laughing look, more saucy far than grateful.

The games were held at the further end of the park. They had half traversed it, and Rachel, her attention drawn to a giant clump of trees that crowned a distant rise, had allowed Toby to fall back into his old jog-trot pace, not less to the satisfaction of Toby’s master and mistress than his own, when Mrs. Lane announced in a hurried whisper that the Grahams’ carriage was just behind. “ So hadn’t you better pull

up and wait until they have passed? Sir John is driving himself, I see," she added, in an anxious undertone.

The brown eyes flashed back their answer. Rachel owed Miss Graham a grudge; for the mud stains on her new black silk; for her cold, haughty looks; perhaps, too, for certain vague, unquiet thoughts that had troubled her, vague and shadowy altogether, but for that all the more unpleasant. She tightened the reins and seized the whip. Oh! if she had but the little wild Arab horse upon which she had ridden as a child in India! But even as the thought flashed through her mind, and through that of Toby the conviction that the sharp cut he had so unexpectedly received must have been a mistake and could not possibly have been intended to accelerate his movements, the fine bays, which had made such a show in Hyde Park during the season, dashed gallantly past, leaving behind a heavy cloud of dust, in which pony, carriage, and occupants were completely enveloped.

After that Rachel let Toby have it all his own way; indeed, she had to be reminded more than once of the possibility of being late, which they were, arriving on the ground when the games had already begun.

"There is Mr. Treherne," whispered Aunt Mary again, pointing to the further end, where stood a line of handsome carriages, evidently containing the *élite* of the neighbourhood. "I wonder if we had better stop here?" with an anxious look around. "Ah!" — and the kind, homely face brightened up, breaking forth into smiles and nods—"there are the Barnetts, and they're making signs to us. Drive over there, dear; we can stand by them."

The Barnetts were cousins of the Lanes, worthy, respectable, well-to-do people. There was a large family of them, and they never showed to more advantage, as regarded number, than when packed in the big waggonette; such a close pack as it was, not to speak of the two on the box besides the coachman.

Rachel, following the direction of Aunt Mary's nods, saw where the Barnetts stood ; she saw the smart bonnets, the waving handkerchiefs, the broad smiles of encouragement and welcome. From them her eyes turned involuntarily to another carriage, against which Squire Treherne leant, talking and laughing. He was evidently making himself agreeable in his careless, off-hand way ; for one of his listeners, a stately middle-aged gentleman, whilst listening, made a most effective display of a remarkably fine set of teeth—none the less fine for being a work of art and not of nature ; and the other, a young lady, bending slightly towards him, seemed to hang upon his every word, which must have been gratifying, for the girl was wonderfully fair and handsome, or appeared so at that moment, in the pale grey silk, trimmed with pink, and a dainty something, by way of hat, set far back on the smooth, pale-coloured hair.

The contrast between the occupants of

the two carriages struck Rachel as altogether absurd. What connection could there be between the two sets—the one his, the other hers? She laughed, frowned, then with a quick, deep breath turned Toby's head in the direction of the waggonette.

“Well, this is nice, to be sure!” cried Mrs. Lane, as she shook the most forward among the score of outstretched hands; and the exclamation, echoed by Uncle Joe, was caught up by the whole party in every tone of voice, the shrill decidedly preponderating.

“Well, Miss Raye, I'm glad you've come at last. I was beginning to think I had been finely sold; for it was only the hope of seeing you that brought me here to-day.”

At the certain memorable croquet-party that had condemned the new white muslin to the wash-tub, Rachel had derived much amusement and gratification from the attentions of Mr. Barnett, junior, who, following the fashion of the day in more things than his ties and theological opinions, set up for

being *blasé* and *difficile*, not easily roused into an expression of feeling for one of the weaker sex. But the great bronze-brown eyes, the saucy laugh, the abrupt, careless manner, had succeeded in rousing him to an acknowledgment of their power. "She was something like!" he had owned, with a burst of unwonted enthusiasm. "A girl that any fellow might have fun with. Such eyes, by Jove!" Of course he had made his admiration quite patent to the world in general, and the fortunate inspirer of it in particular; and Rachel, who delighted in croquet under certain favourable circumstances, had spent a very pleasant afternoon, and felt not a little pleased and flattered when Uncle Joe told her afterwards what a pet of the ladies Henry Barnett was, and how all the pretty girls were setting, more or less, their caps at him. From that day forth the said Henry had professed a sovereign contempt for all things under the sun, with the sole exception of one little brown face lighted up by a pair of bronze-



brown eyes that haunted him persistently. Rachel's eyes had certainly the gift, quite unknown to herself, of haunting those upon whom they happened to fall; and it may therefore be imagined with what impatience he had been on the look-out for a certain pony-carriage, and how eagerly he hastened forward on its arrival.

Rachel laughed and blushed a little as he gave her hand an expressive squeeze; but her eyes turned from, almost before they had been turned upon, him, to another figure at the further end of the ground.

"*His set—and mine!*" she repeated to herself. "Uncle said that any girl in our set would think herself fortunate to get *him*," something of scorn in the last word showing which of the two men it was intended to designate. "Any girl in Miss Graham's set would no doubt think herself fortunate to get Squire Treherne.—Yes, a very nice day, and a very pretty sight," absently, in answer to some remark of her companion.

Meanwhile the games had been going on with no little spirit—racing, leaping, and now a wrestling match was to come off. Mr. Treherne had left the carriage and joined the ring. Immediately Sir John, who had no further excuse for the display of his teeth, hid them away beneath the well-trimmed moustache, as he sank back languidly with a scarce-suppressed yawn, and looked at his watch. Miss Graham followed his example in every respect, and her face very soon assumed so exactly the expression of his, that only one conclusion could be come to, which was that they must both be thinking of the same thing, or, which was far more likely, of nothing. Rachel, on the contrary, awoke suddenly to an interest in what was going on around her, Mr. Henry Barnett's conversation included. She looked at him, and laughed at him, played with her whip and his feelings; she led him on to talk nonsense, and then not only clearly proved that it was nonsense, but seemed to take a mischievous delight

in seeing him make a fool of himself. Throughout it all, however, she was not noisy or boisterous; on the contrary, her voice never rose above the mocking undertone that was intended for his ear only; and half vexed, half pleased, but wholly fascinated, he kept at her side, until a loud shout announced the conclusion of the match; and soon afterwards Mr. Treherne, sauntering up the field, caught sight of the waggonette and stopped short beside it, making a few careless remarks upon the weather, the games, etc., before passing on. Very worthy people he knew the occupants of the waggonette to be, but hardly worth a more lengthened conversation; so, with an unceremonious bow, he turned away, little thinking how a girlish soul had hung upon his every word and look, criticizing them more severely than justly in her angry impatience. "Ha!" he cried, as in turning he caught sight of Rachel. "Once more, good day, Miss Raye."

She drew up her head and lowered her

eyes. More than an hour she had been on the ground, and he had not once looked out for her or hers. Of course not; why should he? He had been friendly enough in the morning, when she had helped to pass away an idle hour; but now there was Miss Graham, and there were other friends of his, too, and she had been entirely overlooked.

Mrs. Lane bent eagerly forward to assure Mr. Treherne of their unbounded satisfaction. "Such a beautiful day—such an edifying sight; so kind of him to give them such a treat. Such a pleasure and gratification to her niece, who had never seen anything of the kind before." And Carlton Treherne, scanning curiously the niece's face, and reading there nothing of the gratified feelings imputed to her, was seized with the wish to make her look at him and speak for herself. He could and did overlook her at a distance, but there was that in her immediate presence that attracted him in no ordinary degree.

"And so you take an interest in our games, Miss Raye?"

She gave him the flash of her teeth, but not of her eyes, as she answered—

"You must take my aunt's word for it. My opinion is that we have both of us seen but little of them; if, however, we fancy that we have, and that we are highly gratified, the fancy goes further, no doubt, than the reality would."

"I am afraid, then, that the spot you have chosen is not a good one for seeing," he said regretfully, wishing he could bring back to the little brown face the bright eager look he had found so pleasant to watch that morning. Talking and laughing with Evelyn Graham, he had quite forgotten that other pleasant *rencontre*. He recalled it vividly now, and wished the girl would look prettier and more like herself. The delicate, sharp-featured face was nothing without the eyes, and those she kept studiously averted.

"I wished Miss Raye to move further

down the field," here broke in Mr. Henry Barnett jauntily; and the squire, as he turned and looked at him, felt that the spell was broken.

"Well, you will all come up to the Hall and take some refreshment as soon as the games are over," he said, dropping back insensibly into his usual brusque, imperious tone; and bowing, not quite as unceremoniously as he had done to the waggonette party, he walked away.

Rachel did not deign him even a parting look; she knew that he had been waiting for it, and her heart beat fast, more resentfully, however, than relentingly. Mr. Henry Barnett, glad to have the coast clear once more, tried again and again to attract her attention, but in vain. The games over, the whole Barnett family crowded *en masse* around her, laughing and talking with painfully loud voices. Her head throbbed, she felt nervous and irritable, and longed to get away. A remark of Mrs. Barnett's, loud enough to be heard at any distance, was the

first she really distinguished. "We shall go, of course. It was very friendly of him to ask us, I'm sure; and the girls have never seen the house."

Rachel looked round at the speaker, whose broad face beamed with satisfaction.

"Yes, of course we will go," Mrs. Lane assented, but with some hesitation; "only we had better wait until *his set* have gone in." She was not of an encroaching or pushing nature; very far from it. She would at all times rather squeeze herself against the wall to allow of others passing by; and such natures get most comfortably through life, and are "fat and well-liking." It is your eager, restless longings that wear the cheek hollow, and furrow the brow.

"*Wait until his set have gone in.*" Rachel repeated the words to herself as the others talked around her. How clearly was the line marked out—the great gulf fixed—separating him from her even as a common acquaintance.

Bowing to Mrs. Lane's decision, she

knowing so much more of the family than they did, the Barnett party waited, then went up in a body to the house.

They were shown into the great dining-room, where a good deal of talking and laughing was going on. Mr. Treherne's aunt, a rather formidable-looking old lady, with a very high nose and prominent eyes, was staying in the house and did the honours. To Rachel the whole society looked formidable ; not that she was naturally afflicted with shyness or false shame—but her head ached, the heat had been too much for her, she said in excuse, and she was not feeling herself at all. She ate nothing, and only looked up once, just in time to see Mr. Treherne fill Miss Graham's glass whilst she protested sweetly, that she never drank more than one glass of champagne ; she could not, really—calling upon papa more sweetly still to corroborate the fact. Whereupon papa showed his teeth, and shrugged his shoulders ; and the squire laughed, and glancing down the table,

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caught a pair of great brown eyes fixed upon him with an intentness he had never seen in any eyes, brown, grey, or blue before.

A queer feeling came over him, and as the look, having met his, was withdrawn, he was seized with a resistless impulse to leave the upper for the lower end of the table; but Evelyn Graham had just asked him a point-blank question, and was waiting for an answer. He gave it; then turning once more to look for Rachel, found her seat empty.

## CHAPTER VIII.

“How cool it is here, how pleasant!” sighed Rachel. Uncle Joe had proposed taking her to see the library and picture-gallery, and she had caught eagerly—oh, so eagerly, at the proposal. They were in the latter now, and its size, its coolness, its quiet gloom she found most refreshing. She took off her hat, and pushed back the damp, waving hair from her throbbing temples.

“Very cool, very pleasant indeed, and—— But, dear me, if I haven’t got the old woman’s spectacles instead of my own! What a way she’ll be in if she misses them! I’ll just give them her and be back in a moment.”

“No, you mustn’t come back,” Rachel interrupted him eagerly. “I should like to

sit here all by myself. I'm so tired, and my head aches ; it's the only thing that will do me good. You must stay with the rest, and prevent their coming to look for me, and only return when you're quite ready to start."

"But, my dear, if they should ask for you——"

"They—who?"

There was a certain sharpness in the girl's tone, and both hands went up to her head ; for the idea of being asked for had made heart and temples throb afresh.

"Why, your aunt, or the Barnetts."

"You can say that you have deposited me in a place of safety, and that I shall be forthcoming when wanted. I do so wish to be alone."

So Uncle Joe went off, and Rachel was left alone. In one of the windows stood a high-backed chair, a genuine antiquity, quaintly carved. Of this she took possession, and leaning the weary, aching head against the black oak, closed her eyes. One

side of the old-fashioned, heavily-framed window was open, and through it the evening breeze blew softly in. Oh! that delicious air—that welcome silence, deepening which came the few far-off, solemn sounds of the closing day. Her head no longer throbbed, nor her heart either. Why should it? She was not at Didford, nor, indeed, in England, but in the distant country where she had been so happy. Over her now came the feeling she had so often experienced there after a day of tropical heat—the languor, the drowsiness, the quivering nerves, the wandering vision, haunted thoughts. Distinctly she saw before her the little wild horse, wild and untamed as herself, over which she had shed so many bitter tears at parting. More distinctly still she saw the one other creature who shared her heart with Mungo. She stood at the bungalow door looking out for him; dancing up and down the veranda, half a dozen pets, quadrupeds, and bipeds at her heels. A shrill, far-off

whistle, the whistle she loved to imitate now in the land of her exile, poor, motherless, homeless little girl. A pause of breathless expectation, and papa stood before her. So vivid the day-dream that unconsciously she half stretched out the hands clasped so quietly in her lap, and as her lips smiled, her eyes filled.

Whilst Rachel, glad to merge the present in the past, sat in the quaint old chair and dreamt, many had been the inquiries after her—from Aunt Mary; from a chorus of female Barnett voices, awed into an undertone by the proximity of the stately old lady with the very high nose and prominent eyes; from one male Barnett voice more urgent far than the rest; and last of all, from Squire Treherne himself, who, having seen the Grahams, Vanes, Myssarts, all leading county families, safe into the drawing-room, had left them to be entertained by his aunt, the Honourable Mrs. Chaloner, with the fashionable gossip of the day, and returned to the dining-room and

the spot where the Lanes and Barnetts still sat, looking hot and uncomfortable, not quite knowing what was to happen next, but anxious to be off now that the honour of a special invitation had been conferred.

Overlooking the rest completely, it was to his old friend Mrs. Lane he addressed himself, hoping they had been properly attended to; and when she assured him, in her simple way, that they had, and looked up at him gratefully and affectionately, he gave her one of his rare pleasant smiles, which, however, changed into something like a frown as he asked, with more than his usual abruptness, "Where is Miss Raye? she was with you just now. Has she gone home?"

He quite believed she had; her expression had been anything but an amiable one. Something had vexed her; she had gone off.

Mr. Lane told him of the visit to the picture-gallery and library, and of the young lady's so perversely insisting upon being left alone.

"She told me not to call her until we were ready to start, but I think perhaps——"

"Not at all. Take your friends round the garden—ladies always like flowers—and I will let Miss Raye know what has become of you."

The proposition, which sounded very like a command, elicited smiles and thanks from the whole party, with one single exception. Ever since Rachel had left the circle, Mr. Henry Barnett had been growing hotter and hotter, and more and more impatient, until his sufferings, mental as well as physical, had now reached a climax. There was no help for it, however; he had to submit, and join the rest in their tour of inspection.

"I wonder what the girl has got into her head," Carlton Treherne said to himself, as he hastily crossed the hall and entered his own room, through which he intended to pass into the library. "Why could she not stay on quietly with the rest, content to be bored to death, rather than assert her inde-

pendence of action as a rational being. I am afraid she is a character, and anything but an amiable one. Well, if I catch her now and alone, she shall be made to look at me and talk to me, too."

Never before, perhaps, had he set his heart upon making a woman look at and talk to him; as a rule, he found them only too ready to do both, without provocation on his part. But the girl Rachel puzzled and interested him whenever he happened to think of her, which was not often, as yet.

The library door opened noiselessly, and as he stood on the threshold the first object upon which his eye rested was Rachel herself, sitting so motionless in the oak-carved chair, his own favourite seat. He thought she was asleep, for her eyes were closed, her hands lay loosely clasped in her lap, her whole attitude was one of deep, passionless repose.

"Poor little girl!" and a pang of self-reproach accompanied the mental exclamation, whence arising he could hardly himself



have told; perhaps because he had been thinking of her as wilful and cross and passionate, and the judgment stung him as harsh, looking as she now did, so soft and quiet, and childish even, with her white dress and clasped hands, and small, still face. Was she really asleep—tired out with her early walk, the heat of the day, and her own wayward thoughts?

Reluctant to disturb, but still more reluctant to leave her, he stood watching her awhile, trying to discover whether it was anything in her person that attracted him so strangely. There was the slight, very slight figure, and he had always professed a horror of thin women. There were the little brown hands, hardly pretty, though so soft to the touch, and the little brown face with its three queer little moles on the left cheek. A low forehead, no eyebrows to speak of, a very small nose, that looked well *en profile*, but less well *en face*. Delicate, sensitive lips that when parted and crimsoned were very attractive, but when closed

were cold and even at times hard. A dainty throat and ear, and head richly crowned with bright brown, waving, curiously arranged hair which, if all her own—and this he very much doubted—was glorious.

After all, the list of personal charms was but a poor one, compared with that of many another woman—such a woman, for instance, as Evelyn Graham ; and yet, as he looked, the man's heart beat with quick, heavy strokes, and he felt the blood quicken and throb through his veins, and he heard how the breath passed through his lips in short, deep gasps. Whatever her beauties or defects, she had awakened in him more of passion at that moment than he had ever felt in his life before.

Still treading noiselessly, he approached nearer ; quite near enough to see the clasped hands rise and stretch themselves out as if in longing ; to see the lips quiver, part, and smile ; to see the tears in the brown eyes as they opened full upon him.

The tall, powerful figure, not unlike that

of the father of whom she had been dreaming, in its height and strength and symmetry, was about the last thing upon which she would have expected her eyes to open. She blushed very deeply, all the more deeply, perhaps, because his look, so expressive and yet so enigmatical to her child's mind, was not at once withdrawn, forcing her own to sink beneath it.

She rose, picked up her hat, and was about to put it on when he stopped her, laying a detaining hand upon hers, and letting it lie there as he spoke hurriedly, almost eagerly, "Don't put it on yet. Your friends are walking about the grounds; they may be some time." The broad-brimmed hat would hide from him her face, and he wished to see it a while longer.

Had she been in one of her wilful, contradictory moods, she might have resented his imperious tone and set it at defiance, but she was feeling neither wilful nor contradictory just then; her head still ached, and her heart too, rather. Yet she felt glad

that he had come to look for her; that it was upon him her eyes had opened, and not upon Uncle Joe or Henry Barnett; that he had not proposed her joining them at once, but had spoken of their being away some time, as if he meant to stay with her—and wished it.

“Have you seen the picture-gallery?” he asked after a pause, hardly knowing what to do with her now he had her to himself.

“Uncle Joe wished to show it me, but I was tired and——”

“Sleepy,” he laughed, wishing to provoke her into looking less quiet and grave.

She did not contradict him, for she could not tell him that, feeling as she did when she left the dining-room, no sight could have been more painful to her than a whole gallery of Trehernes, cold and proud and grand.

“I should like to go now,” she said, brightening up, and giving him both the look and smile he had so long waited for.

“It’s hardly worth a visit; but the room

is cool and pleasant." (He might have added, "It's the best excuse I could find for our remaining alone.") "You will find a strong family likeness between all my ancestors," he continued, as he glanced carelessly round the well-filled walls. "Indeed, that is, I fear, about the only distinction they ever had. They were not a remarkable race; very far from it. Each as he came into possession of the family estate, added his portrait, done by the first artist of the day, I believe, to the family collection, and then felt that he had done as much for posterity as could possibly be expected of him."

Rachel, as she turned from one face to the other, all pale, effeminate, high-featured, realized that a Treherne of the race of the giants, with sinewy limbs, rough-hewn features, and no personal vanity, was an anomaly; and quite as clearly did she realize the mother's pride in his exceptional health and strength, preferring for her son, with all due respect

for ancestry, individual power to hereditary weakness; the muscles of a Hercules, and the constitution of a god, to a high nose and high instep.

Here and there a woman's face gave something of life and colour to the rather monotonous array, but the male sex greatly preponderated. Last on the list came Carlton Treherne's father; at him Rachel looked long, and with something of the pity of which Aunt Mary had spoken. Pale and proud like the rest, and like them in feature, their cold, self-satisfied expression was not his; there was, indeed, a painful contraction of the brow, a feverish light in the large prominent eyes, and a downward curve of the corners of the mouth, that spoke to her, at least, of a cruel daily struggle.

"Yes, I can fancy him looking just like that," she said to herself with a sigh, remembering what she had heard of his love for the self-willed, impetuous, beautiful woman, who had married him because her

heart had been given to another. Involuntarily her eyes turned from the father's face to that of the son, so much stronger, nobler, and happier. "He would not break his heart for any woman, or her love!"

Carlton Treherne had watched her shy look turn to his face, very grave at first, then breaking into a saucy smile as at some strange conceit. He liked the girl to laugh, but not at her own thoughts; that provoked him.

"Well, have you had enough of family portraits? Are you satisfied with your survey?"

"No."

The tone as short as the monosyllable.

"There is another picture, that of your mother. Aunt Mary told me about it; she says it is beautiful. I should like to see it."

Carlton Treherne looked at Mrs. Lane's niece in unbounded astonishment. He had taken his first cousin, Lady Blanche, and

his third cousin, Evelyn Graham, round the gallery, and neither had thought of asking to see Mrs. Treherne's portrait.

"Mrs. Lane saw it in my mother's lifetime," he answered coldly. "It was not painted for the family collection."

There was no mistaking his tone, which was almost repellant. He had turned to the window. Rachel followed in silence.

"There is a very fine view from here ; if you look to the left——"

But Rachel was looking to the right with much apparent interest.

"There's Uncle Joe and the Barnetts!" she cried almost eagerly, for the portrait-begirt room, and even the companionship of the master of Treherne, were beginning to oppress her.

"You wish to join them?" he asked, with a queer, unpleasant feeling, for which he could not easily have found a name.

She nodded, still looking down upon them as they passed below the window. Their hearty greeting, even if somewhat



noisy, would, she felt, be a relief to her at that moment.

Carlton Treherne, standing a little apart, was looking at her—at the small, graceful head, bent slightly forward; the rich brown hair; the tiny ear; the warm, flitting colour—and a resistless impulse, born of his wish to keep her at his side a while longer, made him say, “There is a shorter cut into the garden through the library and my room. I will take you.”

As they entered his room, which Mrs. Treherne had arranged, with no little pride, to greet him on his first return from college, he returned to Rachel and said, “There is my mother’s picture. Mrs. Lane is right; it is beautiful—for it is *her*.”

## CHAPTER IX.

THAT evening, on his return from the games, sitting over his claret, Mr. Graham gave it as his opinion that it was all very well patronizing the lower orders; giving them good wages and plenty of leisure time to spend at the public-houses; providing them with cheap Bibles and cheap newspapers, and more education than they at all knew what to do with; but to institute games in your park, and expect your friends to support you by their presence was, as any unprejudiced mind would allow, going rather too far. Of course, Treherne being a cousin, and a very good fellow, he could not have refused to go; but to stand in an exposed field during the hottest part of the

day to see a set of factory *hands* go through their gymnastic exercises had been a trial. And then poor Mrs. Chaloner was such a bore: in a London drawing-room she did very well, but in the country——”

Evelyn, who knew that there was nothing her father appreciated more than a good excuse for grumbling, in the privacy of his own home (he was the blindest of guests and hosts), let him talk on without interruption; indeed, she much preferred his grumbling at Mr. Treherne and his crotchets than at her. Of a perfectly even, placid nature, she had submitted to the heat and dust, and Mrs. Chaloner's long, rambling stories with the bland equanimity of her father; but, unlike him, without any inward chafing. Of course it was hot and dusty along the roads, and Mrs. Chaloner's stories might be shorter and more to the point, but Treherne was a very fine place, and its master a very fine man. This was about her last thought that night, as she fell into a profound and tranquil sleep.

And Rachel, what were her last thoughts, after a day of so much excitement?

All the evening she was very quiet; to Uncle Joe's surprise, perhaps, too, to his disappointment, for he was beginning to feel the fascination of the girl's high spirits, as did every man who approached her. She only laughed once, and that was when, wishing to please and brighten her up, he started the interesting subject of Henry Barnett, observing, with a knowing wink, that any one with half an eye could see how matters stood; but the young man was smart and good-looking, and would soon be taken into partnership by his father, no doubt. Then Rachel indulged in a rather hysterical little laugh, and, to hide her blushes (so concluded Uncle Joe), rose abruptly and went to the window.

How still was all without, how dark! Not a breath, not a star. Uncle's voice still sounding in her ears, though his words were altogether lost upon her. She longed to fling herself out into its darkness and

stillness, and be lost. When the voice ceased, she turned sharply round—

“I’m so tired, and my head aches. I shall go to bed.”

She did not go to bed, however, but she was glad to be alone. Very slowly she took off the white muslin. “I am glad I had it on; nothing else would have looked as nice.”

As she unfastened her waistband, out dropped the little bunch of faded flowers. She picked it up. “If I keep it, it will always remind me of to-day. Would it be better to remember it always, or forget it at once?”

Seated on the edge of the bed, the flowers still in her lap, she went over the events of the day from the time when she had perched herself upon the stile to sing her morning hymn. How far away that seemed now! Had she forgotten any word or look that she would care to remember? One look, at least, she would never forget; and recalling it, her heart beat very fast, and her head

drooped. It was the look upon which her eyes had opened. Men had often looked at her admiringly, and as if they liked her, but no man had ever looked at her like that before. As she closed her eyes now she saw it again distinctly—would it always haunt her thus? At the thought a strange thrill ran through her of mingled joy and fear, and she felt her cheek burn.

Then suddenly there rose up in her heart a feeling hitherto unknown, tender, and weak, and womanly. Sighing and smiling, she let down slowly the heavy brown plaits, and began to undo them, until the loosened hair fell about her, wondrously thick and long. "It looks so much prettier when it is brushed out," she murmured half aloud; and sitting down before the glass, she brushed it until it rippled about her in long waves of light. Very slowly she lifted one of the ends and twined it about the small, thin fingers; then gathering together the whole mass, clasped it with a sudden gesture, almost of passion, to her

bosom. She was not beautiful, or even pretty, but her hair was; that, at least, was something to admire and be proud of. She had always gloried in its beauty, and now—— Oh, why was she not altogether beautiful, as the girl in the carriage—as the woman in the picture? Still holding fondly clasped the loose bright hair, she bent forward and scanned long and earnestly the little brown face, the eager, wide-open eyes meeting hers, almost startling her by their yearning expression. “Oh! why am I not beautiful? Why am I not fair and stately, and—anything but what I am?”

With an impatient movement she turned from the glass, and the great eyes filled, brimful; then, laughing at her own folly, flushing and dimpling, and showing the white, gleaming teeth, she little thought, whilst weeping for very longing to be beautiful, what a wildly bewitching face hers could be—a face to which that of many

an acknowledged beauty was no more to be compared than is a green field, dotted over with sleek, well-fed cows, to a stormy ocean beneath a sunset sky.



## CHAPTER X.

It was a bright, still autumn morning, a morning to make you glad or sad according to the mood you were in. There was a cool softness in the air, stirred by the faint rustle of falling leaves.

Mrs. Rawdon stood at the garden-gate and looked down the lane. Sunlight and shadow lay across it; but it was not at that she was looking, nor at the eager crowd of schoolboys pouring from a certain gate, whooping and leaping like so many wild savages; but through the chequered sunlight, and above the boys' heads, for something beyond.

Out into the lane streamed the noisy crowd, some racing, some boxing, some

wrestling—all yelling. If our boys were but as eager to match their mental as they are to match their physical powers, what intellectual athletes they would become!

“He will be here directly.”

No earthly music could be more welcome to Agatha Rawdon's ears than those most unearthly yells, for they heralded John's return. When the noisy crew had dispersed, and the lane was silent and empty once more, he would come home, in the warm bright sunshine he so loved, and with a brisker step than usual, for it was Saturday, his own day, and hers too, as it gave him to her for so many extra hours. His work was over for that week at least; and the sun shone, and the air was soft, and a table stood ready for him in the wee garden where he would spend his afternoon with the books of which the little wife would have been dreadfully jealous long since, only that they were so old and ugly. That morning a fresh supply, more than usually musty and unattractive, and there-

fore all the more precious, had arrived from Treherne.

How happy they would make him through the long bright hours! How lost he would be among their pages; only awakening every now and then to the song of a bird in the branches overhead; to the lazy hum of bees among old Stephen's flowers; to the whisper of the breeze as it floated past, and soothed him! It was the same thing every fine Saturday afternoon, and Sunday afternoon too, only that on that day with other sounds mingled that of Sabbath bells, some near, some faint and far-off, dying suddenly away to leave deep and solemn silence behind. Agatha would not disturb him; she never did. From time to time she would steal softly to his side, but withdraw again as softly. She was not wanted; he was lost to her as to everything around. She was not his life as he was hers. She had never known but the one hero; while in those clever old books he found heroes, and heroines too, by the score; and what made

it worse was, that he was always talking to her about them. It was more natural, no doubt, to be a heroine in a grand old Greek play than in a small modern English cottage; to inspire heroes in general than to cook and darn and contrive, and wear yourself out, body and mind, for the comfort of one hero in particular.

Whoop and shout had died away in the distance, but still Agatha stood at the gate and looked down the lane.

"I wonder what makes him so late?" came her anxious thought—her thoughts were often anxious now. Things were going wrong at the school, she felt sure—John's face told her that, and his words too, for he had no secrets from her. When he could put his thoughts and feelings into words, he did; when he could not, she read them just as plainly in his eyes, his step, the tone of his voice; and though by nature far from vindictive, there were moments when she would have given Jim Bates up to the hangman without remorse. It was he who

did all the mischief, and made the school-master's life so hard ; the very sight of the thick, clumsy figure and dull, sullen face sickened her. It was dreadful to be so strong and so wicked. He tyrannized over the whole school, and bent them to his will by mere brute force. No one dare oppose him who had once felt the weight of his fist—that was his continual boast—and therefore he could defy the authority of the master. Agatha hated Jim Bates !

“Grandfather will be tired of minding the roast so long. I must go and relieve him.”

She and old Stephen were very good friends—how could they be otherwise when John was so fond of him ! She could not despise her husband's grandfather ; indeed, she forced herself to look upon him as a reclaimed character, though he seldom lost a chance of proving himself the reverse : that he seldom got a chance was owing to her, and the watch she kept over him.

She turned to go, but was stopped by a greeting from Mr. Treherne, who was just

passing the gate. He was not alone. At his side, bright with life and health and something else too, was the girl she saw every Sunday at church but without noticing her particularly. Now, however, as she appeared so suddenly before her, with flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes and warm brown, tumbled hair, she thought she had never seen a sweeter face or one that told its own tale so plainly.

She watched them down the lane with some interest. They stopped at a gate leading into the park; he held it open for the girl to pass through. Then ensued an eager altercation; eager on her side, at least, for she laughed and shook her head, and flashed up expressive looks into his face; but meeting the steadfast light of the down-bent eyes, dropped hers.

"He is persuading her to extend her walk," smiled Agatha; "but she has got her own way." That she certainly had; for with a hasty shake of the hand she was off, running rather than walking, to make up for

lost time. Not once did she pause; not even as she threw back at him a laughing, triumphant look.

Mr. Treherne was evidently not pleased. Agatha saw him frown and give his head an expressive toss; then he passed through the gate he still held open, and let it swing to behind him.

Agatha found old Stephen basting the fowl, and the lobster-like hue of the venerable countenance was proof sufficient how faithful he had been to the charge. He was released and sent to the gate to watch for John, and remind him of the dinner hour, which he was rather apt to forget.

The one maid of which the household boasted was out for a holiday, so Mrs. Rawdon had the kitchen to herself. The fowl was done to a turn; so were the potatoes; so, too, was the pudding in the oven. There was nothing further to be done, therefore, but to wait. Agatha drew the wooden stool up to the fire and sat down to rest. She very soon got tired now; though

she never complained, she was not capable of much physical exertion, and found it very pleasant to sit quite still, her hands folded in her lap, and her eyes closed.

Not that she was ever really the better for such moments of inaction; the thoughts that would come did her more harm than good always, making her heart ache as well as her head. She could work, and did, early and late. But she dare not think; it made the present so much harder to bear by reminding her that they had no future. They were both so young, with life before them, yet they never talked together of the future as other young couples did. When they were first married she had talked of it very often, proudly and confidently, too, having great faith in John and his scholarship; whenever there was trouble in the present she had turned to it for strength and encouragement. He was so clever, the world so wide, and so full of opportunities of advancement. Year by year thousands stepped out of the ranks, forced their way



to the fore, and boldly took their stand in the advanced posts to which industry, impudence, or brains had raised them. To how few was the present more than a stepping-stone to the future! Though herself the meekest of little women, she had been very ambitious for John; but when she found that any allusion to the future of her dreams only pained him, she had desisted, and it was long since the subject had been mentioned between them. She never blamed him, even in thought; the God who had made him so clever, had also made him shy and proud, over-sensitive, and quite unfit to battle with the world and force his way in it. This conviction had come upon her with a bitter pang; but she never thought of complaining. His fate was hers; she had chosen it with rapture in the past that already seemed so far off.

It was of that past she was thinking as she sat before the kitchen fire. The sight of Squire Treherne with a girl at his side, had recalled to her her own courting days, when

some one had waited at that same gate patiently for hours, to get a sight of her face and a passing look—for it was long before she dare give him more than that. How it all came back to her now—the happy stolen meetings, her girlish passion, and the dreams she had dreamt in the great bare rectory schoolroom! She was back there now, dreaming them all over again. She had shut out the present. Instead of the broad sunlight, twilight shadows lay around her, filling up the distant corners—the ticking of the schoolroom clock was the only sound in the room. Some one stood beside her in her dream, and her girl's heart sickened with very longing for its realization. A breath stirred her hair, a hand, warm and tender and soft as her own, was laid upon it, and from the girl's lips broke the longing cry, "Only to be yours, to share your home, to live and die with you!" Agatha dropped her face into her hands, but the past was with her still, and its dream. Louder ticked the schoolroom

clock, and beat her heart, and deeper around fell the twilight shadows. The man's love was hers, and the home, in her dream. She bent her head lower still and listened—to the pattering of little footsteps coming from the dim distance across the room to her side; soft arms pressing her knee; wee fingers clinging to hers; a bright auburn head laid against her bosom, stilling every vague, unsatisfied yearning.—A start—the striking of the kitchen clock, broad sunlight streaming in once more, the vision a dream, the reality a few salt tears that had to be wiped away.

“What nonsense!” she cried, jumping up with a little hysterical laugh. “One o'clock, and John not home! The dinner will be spoilt! I must go and look for him; he may be in the schoolroom yet; he has often extra work of a Saturday, and dinner is a fact of which he has always to be reminded. But he likes roast fowl, and grandfather and I have cooked the whole dinner between us. I wonder if he would ever think it necessary

to eat if he were not reminded? I wonder what he did before he had me to look after him?"

This is a very common remark with wives, and it may well be a matter of wonder to them how the helpless individual they call husband did contrive to live without them; but bachelors do manage to exist somehow, and are often even ungrateful enough to look back upon their bachelor days with a sigh.

John Rawdon had not been kept in the school for extra work. Punctually as the clock struck twelve he had risen with much alacrity, locked his desk, and having seen the last straggler out, the schoolroom door too, smiling as he did so. The week's work was over. It would begin again on Monday; but for two days, at least, he would be free from the hated presence of Jim Bates.

We are constantly told that human nature is everywhere the same, that its tendency to good or evil depends entirely upon circumstances, early training, etc.

If Jim Bates chance to end his days on a gibbet, and his history gets abroad, he will be quoted as a striking instance of this. A brutal, radical father, a vulgar-minded mother, an ignorant, uncivilized neighbourhood, etc. But others subject to the same evil influences at home and abroad have turned out well enough. Many of the village boys had coarse-minded, radical parents; but one only was the village bully, the torment of the village schoolmaster's life, and the instigator of every piece of ugly, wanton mischief that disgraced the school. A short, thick-set youth was Jim, with a low, depressed forehead, sinister eyes, and heavy, ruthless jaw. Being feared, he was followed. Later on he might become the leader of a mob, the promoter of riots, a plague to government. At present his ambition did not soar so high; it had its aim, but a more modest one. He hated restraint, and he hated learning, *ergo*, he hated the schoolmaster, and exerted all his influence to set him and his authority at defiance.

John Rawdon locked the door, and dropped the key into his pocket with a sigh of mingled weariness and satisfaction. The sun shone, the air was soft; and it was a half holiday. He would forget the worries of the week among his books and papers.

"Do you know anything of little Willie Deans?" he asked of a loiterer.

"I 'ain't seen him nowhere about these days, master."

Little Willie was the smallest, brightest, and merriest of his scholars, and, moreover, "thought a lot of the master," as he expressed it. He had missed school the last two days, so John thought he would go and see after him. The affection and open-eyed appreciation of the young child, who didn't mind Jim a bit, but minded him, "the master," so much, were very precious to the shy, proud heart that was insensibly drawn to whatever was good and true. "Poor little fellow, he will be glad to see me!" and his heart warmed at the thought. "It is not a ten minutes' walk across the fields,

and Agatha won't mind ; she is as fond of little Willie as I am." He glanced towards home, but walked away in the opposite direction.

How soft the air was—how fresh, too, and cool ! His head throbbed, and felt heavy with the din, and close atmosphere of the schoolroom. It would be pleasant sitting in the garden, for the last time, perhaps, that autumn, with the sunlight, and the late song of the birds, and the books that had been sent from the Treherne library that morning. While the world of thought was his he could not despair. He was in it before the first field had been reached ; the blue, solemn eyes were raised, the lips muttered ; he had already left his world for another, and the troubled heart was at rest. It was always so—when most alone he was at least so. In his daily intercourse with the spirit-world he was a very Swedenborg. With gods and heroes, poets and philosophers, saints and martyrs, statesmen and social reformers, he walked and

talked, finding in the mighty dead more sympathy and congenial fellowship than he had ever found in the living. One or two, whose acquaintance he had only recently made, honoured him with their company as far as the stile that led into the last field—but not a step beyond. In a moment they were gone—fled, as are most of our honoured friends, at a moment's notice, leaving the man alone, more alone than he had ever been in his life before.

Having reached the stile, he stopped short, scared by the sound of voices on the other side of the hedge. He could not see the speakers, but that was quite unnecessary; the one voice was only too familiar. Coarse and loud it reached him where he stood, every word falling on his ear cruelly distinct.

“Not dare indeed! Not much pluck wanted for that. Why, what could he do, I should like to know?” with an insolent laugh. “There’s not a chap he teaches as couldn’t beat him. You’ve only to see him



come limping in all of a tremble ; if you so much as look at him, that'll tell you what he is. He's a coward, that's what he is—father says so—and all the village knows it, and so do you, too—only you're a lot of sneaks ! ”

Not a word more ; from his hearers not a word, either of assent or contradiction. They had soon passed out of earshot, and all was silent as before. Above him the sunlit sky, about him the soft warm air, stirred by the faint rustle of falling leaves. The red blood that had slowly spread itself over the schoolmaster's face ebbed back as slowly, leaving it of a grey, ashen hue. With a great effort, a strange feeling of insecurity, as if the earth were giving way beneath his feet, he turned and went his way. Not to little Willie ; the sight of the child who loved and believed in him would be more than he could bear. Not home ; Agatha would be on the look-out for him, and he could not meet her eyes just then. In the empty schoolroom he would be alone.

As he drew the key from his pocket, a film gathered before his eyes, and his hand trembled so that he had some difficulty in adjusting it in the lock; but once inside he felt safe.

The sun shining merrily in through the high, narrow windows, lighted up from end to end, as if in mockery, the big unlovely space; over empty forms and ink-stained desks, over maps and texts, the dancing sunbeams passed to the further end, where stood the master's desk, sitting at which he had learnt lessons so much harder than any he had ever tried to teach. Mechanically he walked up to it now, and sat down as usual, resting his arm upon it. His thoughts at first were broken and confused, until his eye fell upon his right hand, where it lay before him shaking as if with fear—the weak, useless hand that had always been so powerless to defend its owner against insult. Then back upon him came a crowd of bitter memories—of his sickly childhood and dependance upon others. How convul-

sively had that same frail hand clung to that of the giant grandfather for support and protection ! How often had he crept to the man's breast for shelter, feeling safe only in his strength ! And in after years, when he and Carlton Treherne had played together as boys, had it not been an understood thing that the gamekeeper's lame grandson was under the protection of the young squire, and so no one dare molest him ? " You need not be afraid to play with him," Mrs. Treherne had said at their first interview, as the firm white, jewelled hand had rested one moment encouragingly on his shoulder, while the beautiful blue eyes dropped with perhaps too openly expressed pity on the slight, halting figure. " He will let no one hurt you, and he will never hurt you himself ; he is too strong and brave ever to injure the weak." Afterwards, when the boys were men, and the two lives, between which lay the impassable gulf of social distinction, had dropped asunder—when the once strong man who had shel-

tered his childhood, himself in his second childhood, could only claim the care and protection he had once given—he had turned for help and comfort to the woman who was strong in her love, and hiding his face in her bosom had thanked God for the sheltering clasp of the frail, soft arms. How clearly his whole life lay before him—the key to it, its worthlessness and its suffering, *the one word*.

A convulsive shiver ran through his frame, then came a low, sharp sound, an irrepressible cry of anguish.

## CHAPTER XI.

SCHOOLMASTER and schoolboys had had their half-holiday, then their day of rest, and on Monday morning all were once more assembled. Leaves were being turned over, and many a pair of round eager eyes were fixed on the master's desk; for whatever certain idle youths might think of him, or he of himself, he was to the many a most important personage. To one he was the stern embodiment of the Four Rules of Arithmetic; to another, a walking Encyclopædia; to a third, the Latin Primer explained, but, alas! not understood. To little Willie, and one or two more, perhaps, he was the personification of all that was clever and good.

"Boys," said John Rawdon, rising suddenly and confronting the benches, his voice clear and ringing, his blue steadfast eyes searching the many upturned faces, "before lessons begin I have something to say to you." He paused, and many conscience-stricken looks were exchanged. What schoolboy's holiday is altogether free from mischief? Sunburnt cheeks flushed and paled, nudgings, and sly, expressive kicks passed down the ranks.

"Widow Martin called upon me yesterday to complain that certain among you had insulted and ill-used her poor idiot boy." Another pause; the clearing up of many a chubby face, a tell-tale blush on one or two. "It could only have been an act of thoughtlessness on your part, I am sure" (the schoolmaster always shrank from imputing the worst motives to even a bad action), "and so I told her. Had you heard all she said to me, boys, you would, I know, have been sorry for her."

There was a quiver about the lips that

spoke with so much earnestness, and the blue eyes were dim.

“I don’t think, when you have heard her story, as she told it to me, that you will ever again harm her poor idiot boy.”

Widow Martin’s story was no uncommon one, for she had come from a neighbourhood of factories. The young husband, leaving home in perfect health one morning, had been brought back to it a mutilated corpse. The child born soon afterwards had been the second victim, and the poor mother, who had kept up her heart, according to the advice of sympathizing neighbours, for the sake of the unborn child, had worked for that same child patiently, uncomplainingly, but without hope, ever since.

The bare facts of the case were known to every boy present; but the schoolmaster could tell a story as no one else could—it was that had first won little Willie’s heart—and this particular story was not for John Rawdon merely a touching romance, but an

echo of the one great cry of suffering humanity—

“For men must work and women must weep,  
And the sooner 'tis over the sooner to sleep.”

Upon the subject of life's toils and trials he felt deeply. No wonder, then, that, with his natural gift of eloquence, he now spoke so as to touch the rude but not unkindly hearts of the village boys; few of them but had some home tie, some gentler feeling to which his words appealed.

“And now,” he concluded, “having told you Widow Martin's story” (and a wonderful story he had made of it), “you will not, I am sure, add to her trouble by insulting and ill-using her idiot boy. Think how hard she works; how much she has suffered; how lonely a life she leads; how——” But here, unfortunately, the pathetic enumeration of her trials was interrupted by an extraordinary and most discordant sound proceeding from one of the further benches. Its meaning was unmistakable; if not a first-rate imitation of a donkey's bray, an



imitation of it it was certainly intended to be.

There was only one boy in the school capable of so wanton an outrage at such a moment. The schoolmaster stopped short in his address; there followed an ominous silence, a breathless pause of suspense; then leaning forward over the desk, he said, in a loud, clear, unfaltering voice—

“Jim Bates, leave the room!”

Great and general sensation; scared looks wandering from desk to bench. Jim Bates, the terror and bully of the village, brought to task at last, put to open shame before them all! How would he take it—what would he do?

There was but the choice left him of obeying or disobeying. He chose the latter; kept his seat, thrust his hands into his pockets, his tongue into his cheek, and put on the most insolent look his face could assume.

What next? was the mental exclamation that passed, like an electric current, through all present.

The simple repetition of the command, the voice somewhat lower this time, but not less calm and determined.

Ever increasing agitation, hearts beating, cheeks flushing or paling with conflicting emotions. Jim Bates, the hero and bully, *versus* the lame schoolmaster! recognized authority asserted, and defied; a startling precedent, to be henceforth shunned or followed, according to the success or failure of its result, for which result they all now waited.

The one most concerned, and at the same time least concerned, was certainly Jim himself. With him words went but a very little way. For his father's cart-whip he had a proper and very profound respect, but any milder form of authority he held in utter contempt. If he chose to keep his seat, who could turn him out? Not the lame schoolmaster, whom he had so long bullied with impunity. When, therefore, the command was repeated for the third time, the clear, musical voice very low, almost pain-

fully so, but audible still, he kept his seat and look of insolent defiance, speculating with far more of amusement than apprehension upon what would happen next. The man who had never, spite of many provocations, given him a rough word was not an opponent to fear.

Others were speculating, too. A deathlike silence had followed the schoolmaster's words. The plot was thickening—the bully they feared, the master they respected or despised, brought into collision at last. What would happen next?

John Rawdon left his desk, and going straight up to where Jim Bates sat, confronted him, standing closer to him than he had ever, perhaps, done before—having always shrunk from any closer contact than was absolutely necessary. But to the feeling of repugnance was now added another, stronger than any he had hitherto felt, a feeling of scorn such as he had never before known for any living creature. Even the physical ugliness of his tormentor filled him

at that moment with as much contempt as disgust—the coarse, ungainly figure; the heartless, soulless, degraded countenance. How dared a creature so utterly worthless come between him and his work—between him and his scholars, weakening his influence for good? What was the mere brute force of those shapeless limbs that they should prevent his flinging him from his path like some hateful reptile?

There was nothing that delighted Jim Bates more than to stare the schoolmaster out of countenance; to watch his cheek pale, his lip quiver, his lids droop; to say to himself, “He’s afraid of me; he doesn’t dare look me in the face.” This diversion was not to be his now, however. The honest blue eyes, wide open and unflinching, were fixed upon him, and so very expressive was their gaze, the man’s whole soul full of scorn and indignation looking through them, that the boy, hardened as he was, grew hot and uncomfortable, and actually turned red with something that was almost shame.

"Leave the room at once, or I shall make you."

"If you can."

The instinct of brute force was still strong in the village bully, though the look in the blue eyes made him feel rather small. Morally, the schoolmaster might be stronger than he, and get the better of him when looks and words only were needed; but as a man he was still to be defied and despised. He little knew that the strong intellectual will, that has so often been as strength to the weak, was running like an electric current through the slight, sensitive frame; that every nerve, every muscle, too, was straining itself for one great effort. The blue eyes still fixed, wide open and steadfast, upon the insolent, repulsive countenance; the thin, nervous hand, hitherto tightly clenched, opened slowly, then suddenly; with a grip of iron it had closed upon Jim Bates' collar. "Open the door, boys!" he cried in a loud, clear, ringing voice.

Curly-headed Willie, who had been a

breathless spectator of the scene, his heart beating so fast that it was a wonder it had at all remained in his little body, sprang forward and opened the door—opened it wide, throwing it back upon its hinges.

“He *shall* go—he shall not stand between me and my duty; if he destroys the peace of my life, he shall not destroy my influence over others for their good.” John Rawdon said this to himself, and in the thought lay his strength. He did not ask himself if it could be. He said, “It shall be;” and it was. Jim Bates’ numerous admirers, as well as his numerous victims, watching his summary and ignominious exit under the iron grip of the lame schoolmaster, felt rather ashamed of him, and of themselves, and came at once to the conclusion that his was a precedent to be shunned, certainly not followed. Insubordination was being carried too far when it carried you out into the playground in so unexpected and undignified a manner!

John Rawdon returned to his seat. He

looked rather pale; but, then, he did so most days, so that a shade or two of extra pallor would attract no particular notice. His hand did not tremble or his voice either; it was calm and unfaltering as usual. Once he stretched out his hand to a glass of water that stood on the desk before him, but he set it down again without raising it to his lips.

“It must be as though it had not been,” he said to himself. Even the momentary after-weakness he would not allow himself. He felt neither elated nor depressed; what had to be had been. He opened the book brought him by little Willie, and lessons began.

## CHAPTER XII.

THE Reverend Charles Wilkinson, Rector of Riverton, and Julia his wife expressed an almost daily wonder, as they opened the post-bag upon the breakfast-table, at the prolonged absence of their niece Rachel. What could possibly be keeping her so long away?

She had gone to Didford for a few weeks' visit at furthest; and in her first letter from there—though doing full justice to Uncle Joe's merits, and kind Aunt Mary's too—she had concluded in rather a regretful strain—"I miss the babies and the Sunday-school boys, the boating on the river, and the rides with Johnny. Klint, too, is always getting into mischief, and leads me a sad



life. We are, both of us, far too wild and uncivilized for this abode of perfect, uninterrupted order, and shall be glad to find ourselves back among the children, ponies, willows, and rushes of Riverton."

Such had been the first letter received from the Cottage. The second had been like unto it; the third had been shorter, and *minus* the regrets; and now more than two months had passed, and yet Rachel did not talk of a return.

"I can't make it out," said the rector's wife.

"I can," smiled the rector good-naturedly. "The child is happy where she is, and doesn't think of a change just at present. Give her plenty of fresh air and freedom, and Rachel would make herself happy anywhere."

Aunt Julia shook her head with much portentous gravity. "I am afraid that, between them, Joseph and Mary will quite spoil her; letting her have her own way in everything, of course; never making her

settle down quietly to any useful employment, but letting her run from stable to garden, wasting her time upon flowers and animals."

"I'm sure, my dear, she was always very busy here. I often wonder how you can get on without her."

Rachel was a great pet of the rector's; the brown eyes had done their allotted work there as elsewhere. If women could resist them, few men could.

"And whose the credit, I should like to know—hers or mine?"

The rector, hardly knowing whether it would be quite fair to give all the credit to the aunt who exacted the work, and none to the niece who did it, and so cheerfully too, very wisely held his tongue.

Meanwhile Rachel, faithless to the babies, to the parish boys, to the nice old parish women, who watched anxiously for her return, knowing that they could get round her so much more easily than round either the rector or the rector's lady, stayed on at

Didford. Uncle Joe and Aunt Mary were glad to have her. When they told her so in their simple, hearty way, she responded with a quiver of the lip and of the voice too—a most unusual exhibition of feeling; and afterwards, when she sat down at the window of her own little room, and looked out upon the neat, prim garden that lay below it—the garden at whose neatness and primness she had so laughed, and in her heart despised—she clasped her hands in a sort of ecstasy, and owned to herself that no spot on earth, however beautiful, could ever again be to her what that room and garden, with its distant view of certain shadowy tree-tops, were, and must ever be to memory.

“I can’t leave it!” she cried almost with passion, “I can’t leave it and go back to the old life. It was all very well then—but *now*—I can’t!”

And even as she said it, and the fever blood went coursing through her veins, through every throbbing nerve, making her

heart beat as it had only learnt to beat within the last few weeks, she realized clearly and distinctly how much better it would be for her if she could; if, with a sudden wrench, she could tear herself away, and go back to the old life, to its simple duties and pleasures. Pleasures indeed! Her heart sickened at the thought of what had been, but could never be again.

“I can’t *go back!*” cried the child, whose life could hardly as yet be said to have begun, with a certain self-pity. “I can never again be happy in the old way.” The idea of ever again feeling pleased in a new dress that was to be worn at the rectory, or caring to look nice before the long-necked curate, or Cousin Charlie, or the fat squire and his wife, and their stuck-up daughters! “It isn’t my fault. I can’t help it. Can I, Klint?”

And round the dog’s neck went the soft arms, hugging it close; but the brown eyes, though shut and hidden away in the shaggy coat, still saw vividly, as when wide open,

the distant tree-tops glowing crimson and purple and amber in their autumn tints and the autumn sunset ; and when, five minutes afterwards, she peeped in at the parlour and informed Aunt Mary that she was going for a run, Klint knew perfectly well, though she might not, whither that run would lead her.

“ Why does not Mrs. Lane take more care of the girl ? ” Agatha Rawdon had once said to herself when watching a second episode, like unto the first with its reluctant parting, at the park gate. She said the same thing again, this time to her husband, when returning through the park one evening some weeks later, they came upon Squire Treherne and Miss Rachel Raye, enjoying what looked very like a *rendez-vous*.

The squire looked conscious rather Agatha thought, and his bow was colder and more formal than it had ever before been to John Rawdon's wife. His companion, on the contrary, who had made herself very comfortable upon the low, out

stretched branch of a tree, was as blissfully unconscious and self-possessed as if there were no such things in the world as idle gossip or slanderous misrepresentations. If her cheek was flushed to a warm crimson, it was that she was happy, not ashamed.

Again Agatha thought to herself—what a sweet bright face it was that told its tale so plainly! and wondered how it would all end. “He is noble, quite incapable of an ungenerous thought, quite capable of a generous action. I wish he would marry her and make her happy. I am sure she is good, she looks it, and he must see how much she cares for him. He must see it every time he looks into her face, as I do.”

Agatha, the sedate little wife of four years’ standing, rather pitied the girl whose feelings were so little under her control that her secret must be known to everybody, even before it was perhaps known to herself. Her heart thus full of kindly and altogether matronly thoughts, Mrs. Rawdon passed on her way. But for the master of Treherne

the *tête-à-tête*, thus unexpectedly broken in upon, had lost all charm. He felt vexed with the Rawdons, Rachel, himself; and dropping back insensibly into the careless tone from which he had for a while been beguiled by the girl's winsome ways and looks, proposed her going home.

Rachel submitted, not understanding his sudden change of manner. Why should he all at once grow stern and cold, and cease to take any pleasure in her society? What had she done to him? As to any wrong she might have done herself, of that she was what she appeared, quite unconscious. She had often strolled across park and field with the long-necked curate at home, talking over parish matters; to have Carlton Treherne for her companion was more pleasant certainly, but why should it be more wicked? As to the schoolmaster and his pretty, gentle little wife passing quietly by, what harm could there possibly be in that? She was always very glad to meet them; they were such an interesting-looking couple,

and it was so pretty to see them always arm-in-arm, clinging as close as if they were still lovers.

Unfortunately, Carlton Treherne did not see things quite in this light. He could not forget, if the innocent girl of nineteen did, that there are such things as gossip and misrepresentation; and though he was very well pleased to have the child there, her slight figure perched with easy, careless grace on the low-growing bough, chatting or listening with bright eyes, bright cheeks, and saucy, parted lips, he knew, realizing it all the more clearly perhaps from having had so little to do with women, that no one, caring more for her good name than for her brown eyes and pretty, wilful ways, would wish to see her there. She would be none the worse for those occasional meetings—it would be absurd to think so; but then neither he nor she could help people talking. Why did not her relations look after her? It was not for him to tell her that it would be more prudent and maidenly of her



to keep quietly at home, and not throw herself so much in his way.

“You will be going home, I suppose?” he said, by way of taking a step in the right direction, as having first looked at his watch and remembered an engagement that, under ordinary circumstances, might, and would, no doubt, have waited another hour, he next proceeded to look at her. The fresh, rollicking autumn wind, playing fast and loose with the tossing leaves, and scattering them in a golden and crimson shower at their feet, had blown the brown wavy hair about her face, and the felt hat to the back of her head, and making quite as free with the dark serge skirt, left the small, rather clumsily shod foot and daintily rounded ankle exposed to view. The *tout ensemble*, if somewhat wild, was certainly attractive; but somehow it jarred upon Squire Treherne’s present mood, and his look was a coldly critical one. Neither that, however, nor his sudden change of tone, could altogether damp Rachel’s spirits, which were unusually

high that day, as if she had caught something of the spirit of the storm-wind; and jumping up, quite as ready, so it seemed, to leave as she had been to stay with him, she held out her hand and called Klint to her side.

“Tea won’t be ready yet, and I must have a run with Klint down to the river. Poor old fellow! how tired he must be of waiting so long! Good-bye. Ah, by-the-by, uncle wanted so to speak to you about something—business, of course. He called upon you, but you were out. He is always laughing at me for coming upon you so often, when he can’t get a sight of you, let him try ever so hard; but as I told him, I think I know where you are to be found better than he does.”

A saucy laugh, a little farewell nod—the ungloved hand lying one moment soft and warm in his; a last look, mischievous rather, and quite friendly, but nothing more.

Of all Rachel’s moods, and they were

legion, this one of easy, laughing indifference was least agreeable to Carlton Treherne.

As he walked slowly back towards home he was in no pleasant frame of mind. He tried hard not to think of Rachel Raye, and thought of her all the more for trying to forget her. What irritated him most was, that he could not think out his thoughts about her, and have done with them and her. The more he saw of her the less he knew what to make of her. She was never two days, two hours, scarcely even two minutes, the same, and this constant change of feeling, tone, and feature it was that at the same time attracted and repelled him. As to summing her up, good and bad, in half a dozen words, as he could every other woman of his acquaintance, that was out of the question. He could not pronounce her forward, for with the thought came also the vision of her soft and innocent as any child, with the shy, flitting colour, and moist eyes quivering beneath

his. But, on the other hand, when he tried to think of her, modest and well-behaved, back came the vision, this time with laughing eyes, looking into and defying his, and crimsoning lips, whose ready, saucy smiles might well tempt a man to forget everything but that she was a woman and he himself—mortal. In her manners he saw much room for improvement: there, too, the rapid changes, the quick, eager restlessness bewildered, and not unfrequently irritated him; and he had long ago decided that a high spirit and quick, passionate temper were no desirable elements in a woman's character. It was pretty to see her flush and pale, and flash and kindle; to watch lip and bosom swell, and eyes speak out in dark, angry defiance—all for nothing, too! Indeed, it was such a look in her that had first caught his fancy, and led him to separate her from the ordinary run of women; but, like all men, he had a perfect horror of anything like a scene, and he could quite fancy the young lady with the

bronze eyes getting one up upon every possible occasion.

Altogether, the mental survey was far from satisfactory ; all the more so, therefore, was the conclusion to which he came before the hall door was reached, and his second cigar smoked out.

“We get on very well together, and I dare say there’s no more harm in her than in other girls of her age who are allowed to run wild as she is ; but she will be imprudent, and people will talk, so on the whole it would, I suppose, be better to avoid her.”

It cost him little to make the resolve ; whether it would cost him as little to carry it out, was a question he did not ask himself.

When Rachel reached home, panting and breathless, and having chained Klint up to get dry after his evening bath, went straight into the dining-room, she found all there looking so bright and cosy, the curtains drawn, the fire blazing, the kettle singing

on the hob, firelight and shadow disputing possession of the room, that she gave a little cry of delight, and went down on the hearthrug almost at Aunt Mary's feet.

"The lamp smoked so that I had to send it out. I can't think what's the matter with it; it used to burn well enough."

"Then I am sure your chimney smoked instead. I was never yet in a house where both lamps and chimney behaved properly. That would be happiness too great for earth, Cousin Charlie always says."

"You were out rather late, dear, weren't you?"

Rachel looked up hastily. It was the first time that her pleasant rambles had been remarked upon. Nor could she take the words altogether as a simple question; they came out uncomfortably, with a certain hesitation, as if something more were to follow.

"Not later than usual, aunty. I had to give Klint his bath, and he was so tiresome.

First he wouldn't go into the water, and then he wouldn't come out."

"Oh, was that all?" And kind Aunt Mary was evidently much relieved.

"All! Why, aunty, you're quite mysterious; and there's something more you want to say. I know there is; I can see it by your face."

Rachel was amused and curious. Aunt Mary with a mystery—what fun!

"Well, dear, you know I never can keep anything on my mind. Uncle Joe often says it would be better if I could; but I can't, and so there's no use in trying—and Mrs. Barnett was here to-day."

Mrs. Barnett! Then she had come in her son's name, or Aunt Mary would never look so fussy and important. Oh, dear! And she would tell her, of course, and so would Uncle Joe, that it was a very good thing, and she was a very fortunate girl. If only she hadn't encouraged him the Sunday before, and laughed with him so much, and given him a rose just because she had found

the afternoon long, and was very glad when he suddenly made his appearance and relieved her solitude; uncle, aunt, and even Klint himself being all sound asleep.

Aunt Mary, who had been waiting for some remark that would help her out with what she had to say, was at last obliged to proceed unaided—except, perhaps, by the conscious drooping face, which could hardly owe its very vivid colour altogether to wind or fire. That the girl knew what was coming, seemed somehow to make the task easier.

“She didn’t come just to tell me that, I dare say; but it did take me by surprise. I had never thought of such a thing, nor had Uncle Joe, I’m sure.”

The tone was rather plaintive than exultant, and encouraged Rachel to break in quite indignantly, but with face still averted, “But, aunty, you know I wouldn’t——”

“No, dear, of course not, and so I told her. ‘Our Rachel,’ I said, ‘is of too in-



dependent a spirit to go after any one; and as to his thinking of her, or she of him, it's all nonsense.' "

Very proudly the young head reared itself on high. *She go after Henry Barnett*, indeed! How absurd! What a fuss about nothing!

" And as to their meeting in the park and all that sort of thing, I said, 'I don't believe it. Our Rachel knows better than that, and would never do anything so foolish. She knows that he would never marry out of his set, and that he's as good as engaged to Miss Graham. His mother always wished it for him, and why should he not have taken to any other woman all these years if it hadn't been that he was waiting for her to come back?' "

Rachel knew all about it now; there could be no further possibility of a mistake; and even the red firelight glow, towards which the little face was bent, could not prevent its turning very white, and a great stillness falling over it and the whole

crouching figure. Aunt Mary might talk on and say what she pleased, it would not much matter now. She did talk on for a time; then began to feel uncomfortable once more, at the girl's prolonged silence, and wound up with a hurried—

“But it's all nonsense, dear, of course; only I can't keep anything on my mind, and you were rather late.”

“And you thought I was enjoying a *rendez-vous* with Mr. Treherne in the park? Well, you were not far wrong, for if I hadn't met him there, I dare say I should have been sooner home; and it isn't the first time we have met. He said I might walk in the park whenever I pleased, and so did you and Uncle Joe; and when we happen to meet we always talk together. Uncle Joe knows we do. Will you tell Mrs. Barnett this next time you see her?”

“To be sure I will.”

Aunt Mary quite thought that the little speech was a clear disapproval of all unjust suspicions. “Poor child!” she reasoned;

“it must vex her to hear such things, and to think that *his* mother could believe ill of her. It might interfere with her prospects in that quarter, and that would never do ! ”

## CHAPTER XIII.

THERE were no more pleasant meetings in the park. The low-growing bough tossed and swayed, sighed and groaned, as the storm-wind scattered its leaves around it ; but never again, in storm or sunshine, fair weather or foul, did it bend beneath the weight of the slight girlish figure that had taken to it so naturally ; and I can't but think that the ancient tree, if it had anything of feeling left in it after standing for who knows how many centuries, and seen who would care to count how many successive generations, be-ruffled, be-frilled, be-wigged, be-pig-tailed, must have missed the bright presence ; and, such is the contradictoriness of human nature, that Agatha

Rawdon herself, who had set Miss Raye down as giddy and thoughtless, and blamed both her and her relations for those happy, stolen meetings, now felt more sorry than glad that they were apparently over, and almost resented the man and woman giving each other up so easily. That was not her idea of love! But was it love? There was such a thing as flirtation, she knew—very amusing, and for which men were always far readier than for anything more serious. Then she thought of the look she had caught in the brown eyes, and felt as sorry as ever. But, after all, it was no business of hers; nor was it any wonder that a girl should be taken with the big, rough, generous-hearted man, who had always been so good to her and John. Thus she invariably wound up, by way of getting rid of a too perplexing subject.

Meanwhile the objects of so much feminine interest did very well without the lover's meetings, and seemed to miss neither them nor each other. What

Englishman, who is a true sportsman at heart, could be suspected of missing anything or any one when the shooting season has begun, and he has some thousands of acres to shoot over, and a couple of well-trained dogs at his heels? Just then, too, Carlton Treherne had visitors. It is really touching how rich you may always be in friends when your preserves and kennels and cellar are well filled. How anxious, at a certain season of the year, those same friends are to look you up and assure themselves of your well-being; and Carlton Treherne, who had the place pretty much to himself nine months out of the year, was quite willing to entertain his friends the remaining three. The Honourable Mrs. Chaloner had been persuaded to remain—so, at least, she put it—and had smuggled in a venerable bishop and his wife, whose favour she just then found it desirable to propitiate; and the high-church dignitary, after blessing the table, enjoyed to the full the venison roasts and game

pasties, and being himself more particularly blessed with a good digestion, slept calmly in the grand old room beneath the dark, solemn canopy that, according to tradition, had shrouded within its folds the memory of another sleeper, even the man Oliver Cromwell. But if the mighty Protector made more noise in the world than did the worthy bishop, the latter could have competed with him or any other great man in respect of another kind of noise, being an inveterate snorer.

The squire, keeping open house, as it were, with two such very respectable matrons to do the honours for him, it naturally followed that morning and afternoon calls became quite the rage; as naturally, too, it followed that Mr. Graham and the squire being cousins and—"all that sort of thing," and Mr. Graham and the Honourable Mrs. Chaloner such very great cronies, he should shoot with the former, leave his daughter to spend the day with the latter, and that all should meet at the

dinner-table, and in the drawing-room afterwards, where, the respectable matrons being such consummate bores, it followed as a matter of course that Evelyn was enticed to the piano, her fine Italian and German singing being infinitely preferable to their ceaseless, monotonous talk.

His days devoted to the destruction of what had been so tenderly nurtured only to be killed, his evenings to the society of some half-dozen congenial spirits or that of a very handsome cousin, it was no wonder if Carlton Treherne had little leisure left for the thought of a certain wild, not half-civilized girl, who could only look well and picturesque when perched upon a branch or stile, or it may be when caught asleep, like the vision of a dream, in some old quaintly carved chair—the wonderful painter's light, the direct reflection of the setting sun, falling full upon the small motionless, sharply cut features, and around her the solemn hush that belongs only to a library or a picture-gallery, where, in the



stiff rows of portraits, and stiff rows of volumes, speak out the dead features or the living souls, of men.

"I thought a chair always stood in that window," Evelyn remarked one day, when, having gone with her cousin into the library to help him to look for a book, she cast her eye round in search of some comfortable seat into which she could drop until the search was over, her help being only nominal; in other words, an excuse for a harmless, perfectly proper *tête-à-tête*, which might lead to something or might not—she was patient, and could wait.

"So it did, but I removed it," Carlton Treherne answered, with more abruptness even than usual. "It wasn't wanted there."

"No, to be sure not," agreed Miss Graham promptly. She was the soul of acquiescence, and would cheerfully have resigned herself to the fact of white being black, rather than dispute it by so much as a look.

What a rest he must have found in her society, after the whims and caprices, the

ever-changing moods, and defiant self-will of another and far less amiable woman.

Fortunately, tastes differ, or this our world, which is bad enough already, would be ten times worse. Mr. H. Barnett, for instance, was still as foolish about Rachel Raye as ever, declaring her to be the jolliest girl he had come across, and scouting the idea of a comparison being possible between her and any other woman who existed, had existed, or ever could exist. Cross or merry, kind or cruel, she was altogether charming; in his eyes she could not err. When she laughed at him—and she certainly showed very little consideration for his feelings—he hung enraptured on her laugh and forgot to be offended; when she pouted or sulked, the lover's eyes would drop from her face—which was not looking its best, very far from it—to the little brown hand, in which he saw numberless beauties; or, lower still, to the restless foot that, perhaps because slight and pretty, had a trick of always coming forward, as if claiming its share of

notice and admiration. As to her whims and caprices, the more she had the better he was pleased ; and lately she had been up to all sorts of tricks, making a fool of him to his heart's content, and to hers, too, apparently. Sometimes she went too far—there could be no doubt about that ; sometimes, too, she was cross and disagreeable ; but then, as if to make amends, out would come smiles, and dimples, and sly, side-long glances, and saucy, mocking speeches, that he would have bitten his tongue out rather than criticize, as did the master of Treherne.

“ You see, it was all nonsense about the squire and our Rachel thinking of each other,” said Mrs. Lane to Mrs. Barnett one day, about three weeks after that last meeting in the park. “ I knew it was, and that neither of them would ever think of such a thing. I told you so.”

“ Then it just shows how spiteful people are ! ” cried good Mrs. Barnett indignantly. “ Why can't they mind their own business,

and leave their neighbours alone?" Ah, Mrs. Barnett—why indeed!

Whilst Mrs. Lane entertained the mother in the drawing-room, Rachel was entertaining the son in the garden, or rather, the orchard. After a frantic search, when hope had almost given way to despair, he had found her there, pacing slowly up and down, her head bent, her arms crossed behind her. The start she gave on becoming aware of his presence disconcerted him rather.

"I am afraid I startled you," he stammered out, contrition in his heart and on every line of his countenance.

"Yes, you did; but never mind. I am very glad you have come." And she looked him straight in the face as she spoke. "You came just at the right moment." Then seeing him look perplexed, she laughed, rather at herself and her own folly, though, than him, and hastened to explain away her words. "I want you to get me down one of those pears," she said recklessly; "they are left hanging there to get

ripe, uncle says, but they tantalize me so that I can't bear it any longer. I must taste one, and you must get it for me."

They stood beneath the tree, and high above their heads the big, not very inviting-looking pears drooped and bobbed.

"I am afraid they are not ripe," mildly suggested Mr. Henry Barnett, measuring with his eye the giddy height.

"Oh, never mind about that. It's only to taste, you know; and you could get it quite easily, I am sure."

"With a ladder, perhaps."

"No, you must climb the tree. I could, if it were not for these tiresome skirts. It looks so easy."

Easy indeed! Why, as far as appearance went, it was a sheer impossibility.

"I was never a good hand at that sort of thing," he said dejectedly.

"It only requires practice"—this encouragingly. "All the boys at Riverton climb like squirrels. I should not long want a pear if one of *them* was here." And Rachel

pouted and threatened to sulk, a threat so terrible that the victim of her caprices gallantly resolved to risk life and limb in her service.

"I don't mind trying if—you think I could—manage it."

"Of course you can. I only wish I could go up myself"—regretfully—"it would be such fun."

The time was when Mr. Henry Barnett had also thought it fine fun, climbing a pear tree or any other tree; but tastes change, and the sports of our boyhood are not those of our manhood. Should Rachel Raye sulk, or—should he climb the tree? With a convulsive grasp he seized the lower, the lowest branch. "And if I fall and break my leg?" he cried pathetically, turning on his fair tormentor a last appealing look.

"I shan't get my pear, after all," she laughed; "so do pray be careful."

A momentous pause; a shower of descending leaves and twigs; then, dimly

visible among the branches, a figure twisted into the unnatural contortion that must have been quite *à la mode* in the days of that ugly, shabby, canting misanthropist, Louis the Eleventh, when iron cages were the fashion, and he who had the honour of admittance forfeited for that honour the use of his limbs, as he could neither lie, sit, nor stand. From among the branches, too, issued a voice faint and muffled, owing to the speaker's face being in far closer proximity to his knees than was at all comfortable or natural.

“ I can't get any higher. I've got caught, and—— ”

“ Oh, never mind ; do try.”

Another pause ; another shower of leaves and twigs—if Uncle Joe had but seen it !—and then—everything being possible to love—Mr. H. Barnett did contrive to get higher, and soon reached the forked branch from which dangled the so much coveted pears.

“ All right ! ” he cried out more cheerfully to his invisible companion, who was watch-

ing his ascent with quite absorbed interest. "Perhaps if I shake the bough one will fall. Look out!"

He did shake the bough, as well as his very precarious footing would allow, and Rachel did look out; but no pear fell.

"You will never do it that way. Could you not stretch across and pick one?"

"And fall, to a dead certainty," growled the weak-minded victim to woman and her petty tyranny.

A peal of merry laughter rose up to him where he stood tottering, oscillating, his brow heated, his ardour cooled.

"Isn't he stupid, Klint?" was Rachel's aside to that sagacious animal, who, with head raised, ears pricked, and tail stiffened to motionless rigidity, was watching the tree with vigilance as intense as if it were a cat and not a human being whose descent he awaited.

"If I reach you up a pole, do you think you could manage it?"

Now, the said pole had long since come



within the range of the brown eyes, so it was pure malice on the part of their owner that it had not before been called into requisition.

"If you get the pear shall I get the first waltz at the ball next week?" cried once more the valiant champion who was risking life and limb in her service, emboldened, no doubt, by distance and the proper recognition of his own claims to gratitude.

"I'm not going to the ball."

The answer was abrupt and sharp, and into her eyes flashed the look that seemed at once to transform her from a self-willed child to a passionate, determined woman.

"I won't go, and I won't hear anything about it. Here's the pole."

But as she held it up, a hand closed suddenly but quickly over it and her fingers. It was taken from her, held high up with a firm, steady swing that brought a pear, the very one upon which she had set her heart, as being furthest from poor Harry's reach, to her feet. And there on the forked branch

poor Harry still tottered and oscillated, and Rachel, forgetful all at once of his very existence, stood gazing no longer at him, but at another figure, big and erect, standing so near to her that she could catch the quick, heavy breathing as of a man who has been in violent exercise, or is seized with some sudden, strong emotion.

And so the two, after so many wise resolves, after three weeks of voluntary estrangement, met once more, as it was only natural they should, living as they did scarce a stone's throw from each other. It was only natural too, perhaps, that thus meeting they should feel drawn to one another as they had never been before. Dropping the pole, Carlton Treherne held out his hand; and as hers went out timidly to meet it, he kept it, unconsciously, no doubt, far longer than was at all necessary, taking it into his warm, strong hold; and as he felt it burn and throb, he looked into her face with eyes that must have been far more expressive than he was at all aware

of, for, instead of blushing beneath it, she turned very pale, a shiver of irrepressible emotion ran through her, and even the hand he still held grew cold and still as some dead thing. Closer still, as if sorry for it and her, he gathered it to him, and his lips opened to speak; but, at that moment, as fate would have it, Mr. Henry Barnett came to the ground with a crash and a thump, and a scarce intelligible exclamation that was something between a curse and an apology, and—the spell was broken!

“Uncle is at home, if you wanted to see him,” Rachel said very quietly, as the hand, no longer held in his, dropped heavily to her side; and it was quite in his usual tone, half careless, half amused, that he answered—

“I can’t even plead a visit as an excuse for thus trespassing—it’s a clear case for prosecution; but your field happens to be a short cut to a cottage I wish to visit.”

He acknowledged the presence of the discomfited Harry by an unceremonious nod,

crossed the orchard with his usual easy, swinging gait, leapt a fence, and was out of sight.

Rachel, left to herself—for in such a moment as that poor Harry was not, of course, to be counted—drew a deep breath, and lifted up both hands to her burning cheeks—they were burning now, and no mistake, white and cold as they had been not five minutes before; and then, as if further to torment her companion, who had been vainly trying to attract her notice, she fell to hugging Klint, who had of late got less in that way than he at all approved of; then, all at once, catching sight of the pear that still lay on the ground—Mr. Treherne had not been polite enough to lift it from there for her—she held it up in triumph to him (not the him she had been hugging). “The first waltz forfeited, after all! It was not *you* who got it me.”

“I thought you were not going to the ball?”

Rachel laughed; a most provoking laugh

it was. "Of course not; so it does not matter who got me the pear, does it? Ah, there's Aunt Mary calling you. A pretty hunt they've had for you, I dare say. Good-bye."

She held out her hand, far more readily than she had done to *some one else*, and he retained it by force, as he plaintively entreated—

"Now do tell me if you are going to the ball. How can you be so cruel!"

"I have not *quite* made up my mind. I *may*, perhaps. Anyhow, *you* will be there, and so I shall look to you for partners. I should not like to sit out among the old ladies; that would be so dull, you know."

He hardly knew whether she was only joking or in earnest—indeed, that was a point upon which he never was very clear; but, of course, he promised her partners for every dance, talking rather big, his father being one of the committee, till she stopped him short, reminding him that it was very rude keeping two elderly ladies waiting.

Left alone, Rachel made straight for the gate through which Mr. Treherne had passed. To stay where she was, was to run the risk of being caught by him again should he happen to pass back that way; to go nearer home, was to be caught by aunt or uncle, or even Mother Barnett herself. She skipped out into the road, and thinking Klint might like a good run—he had not had one for ever so long, poor fellow—she started off full speed, never pausing even for breath until she found herself in a certain quiet nook.

It was late before she returned, and her first exclamation as she entered the parlour was—

“Aunty, I’m going to the ball. Mr. Barnett was so eloquent upon the subject, and spoke so feelingly and beautifully, that I really could not resist him; so I’m going.”

“To be sure, dear,” assented Mrs. Lane, very readily. She had all along had a hankering after the ball, and was only too glad of a good excuse for going.

"And, aunty," Rachel continued, her voice changing suddenly and growing soft and tremulous, "to-morrow I shall write and tell Aunt Julia to expect me as soon as they return from the sea-side; that will be the day after the ball, you know."

"If you *must* go, dear." And Aunt Mary looked wistfully at the girl as she stood before her, her hands loosely folded, her cheeks burning, her eyes on the ground.

"Yes, I must."

Mrs. Lane was not given, like Mrs. Caudle, to curtain lectures—indeed, she held the perhaps erroneous opinion that men could be very well managed without; but when some harmless confidence had to be imparted she generally chose the quiet night hour as the snuggest and most confidential. That night a confidence had to be imparted, a weighty one; it was with due solemnity, therefore, that she gave utterance to it.

"Henry Barnett was here to-day, Joe."

"Oh."

“And he had a long talk with Rachel—a long talk with her alone in the orchard.”

Uncle Joe grunted. That would account for certain leaves, twigs, and broken branches strewing the ground under his favourite pear tree; orchard-robbing was one of the strongest, though most vicious instincts of every boy's nature.

“My belief is that he said something to her.”

That Uncle Joe did not for a moment doubt. Trust a young man and woman for finding plenty to say to each other when they are alone.

“And what do you think has made her so suddenly change her mind about the ball? Just his begging her to go. She told me so herself—that he said so much, and talked so beautifully, that she couldn't resist him. Well, I hope it will all be settled soon. Her father may any day come back with a fortune, so I'm sure the boy could not do better; and it *would* be a good thing for our Rachel, wouldn't it, Joe?”




But Joe did not answer ; and Mrs. Lane, being a soft-hearted, over-indulgent wife, thinking he might, perhaps, have fallen asleep, did not bawl at him, or nudge, or poke him, or even grumble to herself at his unmanly conduct, but turned round, and dutifully followed his example.

## CHAPTER XIV.

It is well to get rid of the disagreeable things of life: that is one of the grand discoveries of the present age. We silver our pills, and remove the silver from our locks; chloroform makes pain painless, and a certain gas makes the extraction of a double tooth quite a laughing matter; homœopathy has succeeded allopathy—if medicine must be taken, let it be in tasteless drops and sugar-plums, that can be swallowed without a wry face; education is made easy, and religion quite sensational—pretty vestments, processions, flowers, banners, and in aid of its charities, bazaars, tea-drinkings, dinners, concerts, balls.

It was in aid of the hospital fund that

Didford was giving a ball; and it being an act of charity procured it the patronage of many who would not have condescended to regard it as a merely social gathering. The Grahams had taken tickets. Evelyn Graham made a point of doing what others in her set did, all the more readily this time from the consciousness that a ball dress suited her better than any other, and that in all probability she would be pronounced the belle of the room. Mr. Treherne was also going, and the two friends who were staying with him—Sir Ralph Randal, a college chum, and a capital good fellow; and a Mr. Dashwood, a rising barrister, who was asked everywhere and everywhere made much of, no one could have told you why, unless it was, as Carlton Treherne put it, that he was the most fortunate and the most selfish fellow going. And then, though she was hardly to be named in the same breath as the master of Treherne, and the Grahams, with other of their county friends who had promised to muster strong



to keep them in countenance, there was Mrs. Lane and her niece Rachel.

To please his friend Sir Ralph, who was boy enough still to like dancing, Carlton Treherne made his appearance in the ball-room much earlier than he would otherwise have done. He was at once seized upon by Sir John Graham, who was feeling rather uncomfortable, not having as yet caught sight of any of his own set, the rooms being very large, and, to the honour of Didford be it said, very well filled.

"I hope we shall find some pretty faces and a good dancer or two among the natives," laughed Sir Ralph, as he and the barrister followed their host across the already crowded space, looking about them as they went.

"To what part of England can you go and not find pretty faces?" returned the other languidly. "Why, I see half a dozen at least from here."

"Where?" with youthful ardour.

"Well, tastes differ, you know. I find

Miss Graham a remarkably fine girl; you don't. You object to her size, her whiteness, her stateliness, her Italian songs; in short, you think her a bore, and your friend a fool for being so easily taken in, falling a victim to the first woman who makes a dead set at him."

"I never said that!" cried the loyal-hearted baronet, with all the more eagerness because it happened to be a pretty correct interpretation of his private thoughts.

"You object to fair women on principle, I know; and to well-behaved ones, too, I fear."

"Nonsense! I prefer a brown eye to a blue, and I object to being bored."

"Well, there's a face dark enough to please even you, I should think," as they passed by a comfortable-looking old lady in garnets, and rather a queer-looking head-dress, and beside her a girl whose dress certainly contrasted with the brown skin it framed. "Brown eyes, brown hair, brown neck, brown arms. You're in luck's way.

But——” He stopped short; his companion had been drawn into the magic circle of a family of girls, and therefore of partners—a county family, of course—and was lost to him and his pithy remarks.

There had been square dances and round dances; and Carlton Treherne, who never gave himself airs or held aloof—which would have been quite out of keeping with his character as a Liberal and friend of the people—had gone his round, towering high above the general sea of heads, on the look-out for all who were entitled to a word or nod. Not a familiar face escaped the one keen, rapid glance. No claimant on his notice had to go away aggrieved for want of the patronizing nod, or friendly, off-hand word.

Mrs. Lane, being at the further end of the room, came last, but then she got a few more words than the rest.

He had shaken hands with Rachel, as he might with Miss Smith, or Miss Jones, or any other Miss; but whilst talking with the

aunt he saw her distinctly; he saw, too, that she was looking at him, her eyes growing larger, brighter, more wistful. "Would he go away without asking her to dance? He had danced twice with Miss Graham, and valsed once round the room with a plain, awkward-looking girl, with whom he had hardly exchanged a word. Had he made up his mind beforehand not to dance with her; or was it that she was not looking well, and different from the girls in his own set?" She remembered the looks he had given her, and which he had never given Miss Graham—of that she felt quite sure—beautiful though she was. But why did he not ask her? She was going home the next day, home to the babies and the long-necked curate, and the parish work; it was their last chance of being together, and she had so counted upon it! Would they never again have a word together? What harm could there be in that, even if he was, as they said, engaged to Miss Graham? And still her eyes sought his, growing larger,

brighter, more fearful. He turned to her with a half smile ; the agony of suspense had reached its height, there was a queer sensation at her heart, a singing in her ears, a film had gathered before her eyes. Carlton Treherne saw it all. The smile deepened—a very amused smile it was—and——

“This is my dance, if you please, Miss Raye.” Mr. Henry Barnett stood beside her, puffing, blowing, scarlet in the face, and perspiring profusely. Mr. Treherne bowed, smiling still, and retired.

“I have got them to play your favourite waltz,” quoth Mr. Henry Barnett, with an air of great importance.

“I’m tired. I can’t dance just yet.” Rachel was both looking and feeling very cross and miserable, and as much inclined to cry as she had ever been in her life before.

“Oh, come, now, that’s too bad ! You told me the other day that you could dance the night through without feeling tired.”



“Not with a partner who twists me about as you do. You, and your friend the doctor, between you, have tired me out.”

Poor Harry had the reputation of being a capital dancer among his own set, and he now looked rather crestfallen, though the saucy flash that had returned to her eyes, spite of the recent disappointment, encouraged him to persevere. In vain, however; she would not give him that dance or any definite hope of another. Five minutes after, with flushed cheeks, sparkling eyes, and eager, outstretched hand, she got up to dance—but not with him.

Meanwhile Carlton Treherne had found his way to Evelyn Graham, and seated himself beside her. Certainly he had never before felt as much attracted to her as he did that night. For this there were many reasons, the first among them being that she was incomparably the handsomest and best-dressed woman in the room. To please him and his fastidious taste, she had put on the most elegant of her London ball-dresses,

which had received a very flattering notice in the *Morning Post*. Rising above it was the polished mass of pure white flesh, the shoulders, throat, and neck so faultless in colour and symmetry. Yes, she was handsome, elegant, and soft, and the very best companion a man could choose when tired out with a hard day's shooting. She exacted nothing, expected nothing, made commonplace remarks in a low, well-modulated voice, and you might respond to them or not as you pleased. If you were to be bored, better be bored by her than by most other women. Leaning towards her chair, looking now at the full soft profile, now at the white rounded shoulder, the white rounded arm, he contrasted with her, his high-born cousin, and unfavourably, it is to be feared, another woman whom he had also deigned to admire, but in a very different way. "After all, what was there to admire in her?" he now said, all the more ready to criticize because of the feelings that had haunted and tormented him for some time

past. Take from her her brightness and a certain originality of look and manner, and what was left? A pair of great bronze eyes, and a head well covered with prettily waving hair, if indeed either the wave or the hair—three parts of it, at least—was natural. Then, in other respects, she was positively objectionable: abrupt, capricious, exacting, giving herself all the airs of a beauty. Why, Evelyn, who was really a beauty, gave herself no airs at all; and as to exactions or caprices, he had never seen a shadow cross her fair, stately face. People said she had designs upon him, perhaps; but so, no doubt, had the other girl. A fortune was a prize that every woman might think worth the trying for. As to her caring for him individually, he remembered the merry laugh he had caught as he came upon her suddenly in the company of that fellow Barnett, and felt rather a grudge against them both. That she wanted him to ask her to dance was plain enough, and natural enough too. She had told him that she

“loved dancing,” and the restless feet that never could keep quiet for long together (that was another objectionable point about her) were longing, of course, to be in wild, rapid motion. Thought lingered longer on those little dainty feet than was quite prudent, and, really, considering what a very insignificant little being she was—not pretty, well-mannered, or amiable—it was a wonder that he should trouble himself about her, that she should be so constantly in his thoughts even if it was only to find fault with her, which was rather a shame.

The music—Rachel’s favourite waltz—stopped, and Evelyn, who had already ventured several harmless remarks, now ventured another.

“Don’t you think the room is getting rather warm?”

The sudden cessation of the music, the sudden murmur of his cousin’s voice in his ear, made Carlton Treherne lean towards her to catch her remark and answer to it. His

hand rested on the back of her chair—no unpardonable familiarity considering they were cousins, and that he had known her as a child, and certainly not one that she resented—touching as it rested there the white warmth of her perfect shoulder; but I am inclined to think that he was quite unconscious of the contact, or at least quite indifferent to it.

“What did you say?”

“Oh, I was only asking you whether you did not find that the room was getting very warm.” She answered him at once with her usual smile; not such a smile as he had often tried to provoke in another woman—a smile that could mean mockery, defiance, ecstasy, anything and everything, but one upon which he might always rely as meaning something pleasant, sweet, placid, and indulgent.

“You have promised me another turn, mind.”

“Oh yes, of course.” She had taken off her glove, and was playing with her fan.

This showed off her hand, and she knew that he was looking at it. "Is yours the next dance? I am engaged to Mr. Lawrence, and Mr. Dashwood, and—I really don't remember to whom else. Here are my tablets. Will you look?" She held them out to him, but——

How instantaneously had his ardour cooled, and his attention wandered once more; for just as Evelyn spoke, some one else laughed, and there was no mistaking that laugh. Often enough had he heard it in the depths of his own woods, beneath the solemn silence of the old park trees, in the pretty shady orchard not many days before—in sunshine and storm, in mirth and mockery he had heard it, and sometimes he had hailed and sometimes resented it; but it had never produced quite the same effect as now. His arm dropped from Miss Graham's chair as he turned sharply towards the sound. Yes, there she was, sure enough, not many paces off, and quite within the range of his eyes, leaning against an arti-

ficial flower-wreathed pillar, in an attitude that was perfectly graceful, though some might think rather too easy and unstudied; and around her was a knot of gentlemen who had joined in the laugh. Mr. Lawrence, M.P. for the neighbouring county, and rather a swell; Mr. Dashwood, languid still, but evidently amused; and nearest to her, leaning against the same pillar, holding her fan, gazing into her face, and hanging delighted upon every word and look, was his own and best friend, his college chum, Sir Ralph Randal. "How had the fellow got introduced to her? What did he mean by looking at her like that? What did she, too, mean by looking like that?" Seated beside her aunt, pale and silent, he had found the girl far less attractive than in the dark serge and felt hat, and now—she was simply radiant; talking, laughing, all aglow with excitement, and pleasurable excitement too—of that there could be little doubt. "It was not his presence only that could kindle her into excitement, then! The squire first, then

the wine-merchant's son, and now the good-looking baronet. In all probability meetings in the park and wood would recommence for her in right good earnest. Why not? He was a very good fellow was Ralph; not overburdened with intellect, but remarkably good-looking—disgustingly good-looking, in fact. A curly head, fine complexion, white teeth, a title and a fortune—Miss Raye's dimples might do something for her yet."

The hall was clearing on that side, many having gone for refreshments into the next. The little group around the pillar separated. First Mr. Lawrence went off, then the barrister; but not until, at his request, Miss Raye had handed to him her tablets with a quick blush, and a smile that might well have converted the most inveterate woman-hater.

Mr. Treherne opened his grey eyes rather wide at this proceeding. The barrister, he knew, did not care for dancing, nor did he care for women; a pretty face had little attraction for him, a saucy tongue even less;



he had a horror of the fast girls of the period, and professed to think that all women, like good little children, should be seen and not heard. He had expressed a languid admiration for Evelyn Graham, yet he had hardly exchanged six words with her during the evening—unquestionably, handsome as the stately Evelyn was, her companion had no cause to be jealous of her, whatever he might be of the brown-eyed girl who, insignificant as he was pleased to pronounce her, had yet collected around her the most fashionable, and therefore, of right, the most fastidious men in the room.

Mr. Lawrence and Mr. Dashwood gone, Miss Raye and the baronet were left alone. And a very interesting, well-matched couple they were: he tall and stout, and so very good-looking, with his fair, frank, boyish countenance; she tall, too, but slight, with a small dark face and wild, shy glances. Carlton Treherne saw how very well-matched they were, how nicely they set each other off. He had never before thought

Ralph so handsome, and Rachel—— Well, they certainly formed a very attractive contrast, and it displeased him. Another thing he saw which displeased him also : he saw Sir Ralph lean towards her, his arm almost as near to her shoulder as his had been to his cousin's, and whisper something in her ear, at which, from sparkling, she grew very still, and dropped the full lids, while up over her face rose the slow, soft, tender blush that *his* words had more than once called up there, and which he fancied, fool that he was, only his words *could* call up.

“Are you going to the Lawrences' garden-party to-morrow?” the stately cousin was asking in her low, well-modulated voice, and with her sweet, indulgent smile. But she got no answer.

The music struck up. Up flashed at the first merry burst the brown eyes alight with mirth and excitement, and up panted Miss Raye's substantial shadow, Mr. H. Barnett ; but the handsome baronet bent eagerly and anxiously forward, and his companion

laughed, and shook her head, not at him, but at the discomfited Harry; then, giving herself up readily enough to the arm outstretched to receive her, away she was whirled, whilst he, to whom the brown eyes had appealed so eloquently but in vain, was left to contemplate the deserted pillar, and solace himself with the reflection that the friend of his bosom, who had for years been to him as a brother, was one of the best valsers of the day—a young lady, and a very pretty one, too, having once enthusiastically exclaimed in his hearing, that it was quite worth while to have lived for the pleasure of one valse with Sir Ralph Randal. And the fellow now had his arm round Rachel Raye's waist—that little supple waist! and leaning towards him, forgetful of all but the intoxication of his flattery, his good looks, the easy, rapid motion to which the slight, yielding form would obey with delight, she was no doubt quite ready to echo the wild, soulless words.

“ Will you be at the Lawrences' garden-

party to-morrow?" the stately cousin was repeating for the third time, her voice as low, her smile as placid and indulgent as ever.

"I never attend garden-parties;" the tone as short as the answer. Then, as Mr. Dashwood came sauntering up leisurely enough to claim the promised dance, he rose and turned away in the opposite direction. The barrister took two turns round the room, as in duty bound, exchanged a couple of sentences with his handsome partner afterwards, then engaged in a political discussion with the M.P. in a corner of the room, until it was time to make his way across to where Miss Raye sat. He walked through the quadrille with her, and even condescended to make himself agreeable, an effort of which he would have pronounced himself quite incapable an hour before.

"Now for another valse!" cried Sir Ralph, who, together with one or two more, was watching for her return, ready to start with the music. What cared he that the

shoulders framed by the white dress were brown, and not as full as they might be some years hence? It was not a model he wanted, but a partner, and as such she was perfection; held to him lightly but closely as they went flying over the ground; her figure was for him perfection, too—those bounding limbs, that supple waist, the ready feet that lent themselves to every motion, slow or rapid, and, to heighten the charm, the face that, unlike most faces, could be heated without being over-heated, looking all the prettier for the fresh young blood that excitement brought up into it.

“Well, dear, you must be tired, I’m sure,” Aunt Mary observed, as Rachel, after the valse, returned to her side, her dress somewhat less fresh, and her hair waving somewhat more about her forehead than when she had taken that last look at herself at home, wondering whether she was really looking her very best, a fact about which she had many serious and cruel doubts.

Poor Mrs. Lane, unaccustomed to such

dissipated hours, had been getting more and more sleepy; her head had been gradually sinking lower and lower into her plump neck, and she was now winking and blinking in a way that was rather alarming, and altogether unnatural in any creature but a cat or an owl. "Mr. Treherne was here. I think he meant to ask for a dance. He waited some time; but I thought if you didn't mind—the carriage was ordered an hour ago—and uncle will be sitting up for us, and—— I shall fairly drop asleep as I sit, unless you take pity on me," she might have said, and her eyes, from which was slowly but surely ebbing the last gleam of intelligence, said for her.

At the first words Rachel had turned from Sir Ralph who, the dance over, still lingered near, and, as if attracted by some magnetic influence, looked straight towards the spot where, at some little distance, towering above the heads of the group that separated them, stood Mr. Treherne. He was listening, ostensibly, to an apoplectic-looking old gentle-

man who was holding forth with much fire and gesture; but she met his look, and in that look lay her triumph, the greatest of all that memorable, never-to-be-forgotten night. One look for so much love and bitterness, mortification and heart-sickness—but she was satisfied. “I am quite ready, aunt,” she said, as her eyes dropped slowly and quietly from before those other eyes still fixed upon her. Then she rose erect, radiant, triumphant, her bosom swelling, her lip, too, with many different emotions. One look, the *last*, to take away with her. The strong man might despise the slight girlish frame and womanly weaknesses and follies; but there was in her something of the stuff of which martyrs are made, little as he might dream of it.

Of course Sir Ralph accompanied her to the cloak-room, and, having seen her duly shawled, to the carriage, or, to speak more correctly, the fly.

“I shall only be a few days longer at Treherne,” he whispered, pausing ere he


performed for her the last office, that of drawing up the sash. "I wish we could meet to-morrow."

"To-morrow," she repeated softly, but hardly as if speaking to him ; then she held out her hand, at which he seemed a little surprised, though, of course, much pleased. Not for a moment did he accuse her of being fast or forward ; but, being himself young, good-looking, and spoilt, it was natural enough that he should believe he had made an impression.



## CHAPTER XV.

As Evelyn Graham rolled smoothly homewards in the showy carriage that had been quite as much admired in London as herself, or rather more, perhaps, she hardly knew whether to be satisfied or not with the ball to which she had looked forward as so good an excuse for the display of her elegant season toilette, her jewels, and her shoulders. It was true Carlton Treherne had not made love to her ; but, then, it was not his way. He never would—of that she felt quite sure ; nor was lovemaking, after all, an indispensable, though perhaps an agreeable, adjunct to an advantageous settlement in life. He had not danced with her very much ; but more, at least, than with any one



else. He had also sat beside her—not for the sake of conversation, evidently, for he had been unusually silent; but, then, not being accustomed to look upon him as an agreeable man, a few words, more or less, mattered but little, she thought. His disappearance had been sudden, and she did think it rather odd that he should have left the room without bidding her good-bye; but, then, she was used to his odd, erratic ways, and had schooled herself into overlooking, in the master of Treherne, what might in another man have struck her as rude or unmannerly: in her partial eyes, there was something about him, we need not specify what, that would cover a multitude of sins.

On rolled the carriage through the cold, bright, starry night. Sir John had from the first composed himself to rest, and was now snoring softly. The sound was suggestive. Evelyn yawned. Her thoughts began to wander from the main chance, the chance of making a good match, and to

grow confused. She objected to anything like a struggle even with such a very insignificant thing as sleep ; so she yielded at once, and long before they had reached the lodge gates, her breathing, not to give it a harsher name, mingled with that of her father.

With only such occasional interruptions as a cup of tea, a tray of refreshments, a word with her maid, Miss Graham slept on until four o'clock the next day, when she appeared in the drawing-room, pale, heavy-eyed, the reverse of handsome, and far too listless to stand up with proper spirit against the oppression of her unnatural parent, who, notwithstanding her pitiable condition, grumbled at her till dinner time ; and afterwards, by way of variety, at the country at large—its laws, customs, religion, constitution ; its press, army, navy, clergy ; its tradesmen, mechanics, labourers—clearly proving, to his own satisfaction, at least, that one man, and one only, was capable of reforming the whole, and that man—himself !

Different natures will be very differently affected by the same thing. The ball, that kept Evelyn in bed till four o'clock, drove Rachel out rather earlier than usual. Before the dew was off the grass, while it still lay, round as pearls, bright as diamonds, over the gossamer-webs with which that grass was covered, she had visited the garden and orchard—to say good-bye to them, as she told Klint. Under the pear tree she stood some time, falling into a reverie, from which she was only roused at last by the distant barking of a dog, answered to by a low growl from Klint. Leaning over the gate through which Carlton Treherne had passed, startling her with his sudden appearance, she lingered there, too, looking out over the fields to a certain green slope where stood a group of great, old trees, now faintly visible beneath a thin, filmy veil of mist. So long she stood that Klint, who was not of a reflective turn of mind, grew impatient, and poking his old head through the gate bars in search of some independent source

of amusement, he unfortunately caught sight of a picturesque flock of sheep crossing the field. To see was to pursue. Wildly fled the flock before him, and behind him more wildly still flew his mistress, calling, whistling, coaxing, threatening. "You naughty, naughty dog," she cried, or rather gasped, when, having pursued the poor, fat, waddling sheep to the very brink of a deep ditch and watched them jump it, every one of them, from first to last, a feat which evidently afforded him much grim satisfaction, he was at last secured, and dragged back to the gate by one of his ragged old ears. "How can you behave so? A pretty character you'll leave behind!" But he looked up in her face and wagged his tail, and tried hard to lick the hand that grasped his ear.

Arrived at the gate, her hand upon it, she paused once more, her eyes turned back across the fields as if for a last look; but Klint dragged her on. Perhaps, being a wise old dog, and let into many of his mistress's

secrets, he had come to the conclusion that such idle dreamings were dangerous things, and he wished to prevent her indulging in them.

They had the breakfast-room to themselves when they first entered it, uncle and aunt not being down yet. It still wanted twenty minutes to nine. When the clock struck they would be seated. They breakfasted at nine, and had done so ever since Mr. Lane had retired from business; and no event, however extraordinary—and a ball was an extraordinary event—could bring about a change in the daily routine.

The idle dreamings, interrupted at the gate, were now resumed by the fire, but were once more broken in upon—this time by Jane bringing in the letters. There was one for Rachel.

“Very glad to see you. Be sure to wrap up well. Children all right—advent of two teeth. Further news deferred till we meet, etc.”

“Oh dear!” and she gave a sigh so deep

as to be almost a groan. "How provoking!" Then, the letter having been read, she crushed it up impatiently in her hand and threw it into the fire. "Hopes I shall not mind the delay. But I do mind it. I want to be back among the babies and old women—anywhere, so that I get away from here. 'A few days, sooner or later, can make no difference,' " referring to the letter. "Who knows—who knows?" And again she fell a-dreaming, rocking herself softly to and fro on the wee chair bought for and used by her when a wee child, her outstretched hands supporting and covering her face.

Uncle Joe and Aunt Mary were delighted to keep their niece a day or two longer. Mrs. Wilkinson proposed passing through London on her way home from the sea-side, to introduce the baby to "Grandmamma." Hence the delay.

Rachel was unusually silent during breakfast, and did not laugh once—not, at least, until Uncle Joe asked her what mischief

she was brewing; and then she did laugh, a short, tuneless little laugh, as she said that she was not brewing mischief, but just trying to find out how it could be prevented. Seeing Uncle Joe look puzzled, she laughed again, more naturally this time, and declared that she felt so dull and stupid after the ball, that she was almost ready to vow never to go to another.

“Put on your hat, and come out with me; nothing like a brisk walk for setting one to rights after a sleepless night.”

A sudden thought flashed through her mind. She must not see Mr. Treherne again, or the friend with whom she had had such fun the night before. It was of that she had been thinking all the time. She therefore seized upon Uncle Joe's suggestion in a modified form. She would walk over to Wickledcan that afternoon. The Barnetts were always glad to see her, and she had not wished them good-bye. Perhaps she might even be induced to sleep there; if not, they would drive her home.




All this she said rapidly, as if fearing opposition ; but Aunt Mary only answered, with a meaning look at her husband, " Yes, dear, of course ; quite natural. I'm sure—— But Uncle Joe could drive you over." To this, however, Rachel would not listen. It was the walk she wanted, and Klint would take care of her. Uncle Joe objected to the long, lonely walk ; but his wife quieted him with the confident hope that the girl would not be alone after all. Harry would be leaving his office about that time, and could hardly fail to meet her. " Upon this she had, no doubt, reckoned, and it was as well that the young people should meet, for there had been something like a coolness between them the night before, which would account for her dulness and silence, and evident anxiety for a meeting."

Dinner over, Rachel started. She had a walk of four miles before her in the loneliest part of the country ; but its very loneliness was its chief attraction in her eyes. Her way lay across fields, and through woods,

and along the banks of the river. She would not meet a living creature; she would have the world to herself, the world of sky and water, and leaf and grass. If she could have chosen her companion—have had the one only, and him all to herself—she would not have cared to be alone, or so much for the company of water, leaf, and sky. But he never could be only hers, except, perhaps, for one short, happy hour; and that was why she must avoid him, be glad to go away. She had so counted upon their having one last happy hour together at the ball; but the chance had been lost—not through her fault, but his.

She had crossed the fields, and the river, and having reached the wood, sat down on the fallen trunk of a tree to rest. She was in no hurry to get to Wickledean. She would have enough of Mr. H. Barnett and his attentions for the remainder of the evening; so she sat on, her attitude more comfortable than picturesque, her elbows on her knees, her two hands framing her



face—a still, lone figure, and all around her hushed and motionless as if in sympathy with her mood. At last, some invisible creature, bird or squirrel, sending a dry twig down upon her head with a crash, made her look up, not at the branch only, but through the open space above at the dark, stormy sky. Unfortunately, however, instead of looking at it from a practical point of view, as a condensed mass of vapour that might at any moment descend in fury upon her devoted head, she saw in it only a type of her own life. Not the life of the last few years—its experiences, good and bad, could be summed up easily enough, and without stormy emotion: its pleasures, a new frock or ribbon, a letter from India; the advent of a baby at the rectory; a visit from Charlie the soldier cousin, or flirtation with him and a few more besides; its trials, the separation from her father, Aunt Julia's tempers, and the rector's long sermons—but of the life lived in those few last weeks. As, startled by the falling twig, she looked

up, a sudden gust of wind, rising from the bosom of the great universal stillness, swept through the branches overhead, tearing away from them as it passed full many a leaf that, left to the slow process of time, might have hung there for months, whirling them onwards and upwards in its impetuous course.

Rachel watched them as they mounted higher; and as her own hat was blown from her head to her feet by the sudden blast, she clapped her hands and laughed, though there was a dull pain still at her heart, and her eyes were moist. "That storm-wind, that driven leaf! There were, then, the same mad impulses at work in the outer as in the inner world. The leaf, torn from the bough and driven on by a resistless impulse—whither? To the earth once more, of course. No violent impulse in nature can last long, nothing in which is the breath of frenzy or of passion. The storm passed, the storm-driven leaf left on the earth to rot and die, as it would have done on the bough, only so much sooner."

Another howling blast, another wild eddy of leaves, another tug at the felt hat—but a pair of arms were clasped about it—and Rachel's whole attention was now given to her present very uncomfortable position. When she at last ventured to look up, all around was threatening enough; the clouds, a black, moveless mass, seeming almost to touch the tree-tops. To the storm-wind had succeeded a yet more ominous silence, the silence of a great expectancy; then, in the distance, the sullen growl of thunder.

“Oh, Klint, what shall we do?” she cried, between laughing and crying. “Two miles from home, just as far from Wickledan, and the storm that has so long threatened come at last!”

Splash-splash—down came the heavy thunder-drops; few at first, but, ere long, a mighty force that could neither be avoided nor resisted. Thunder, lightning, and that sweeping torrent, and she in the open fields—for she had been afraid to stay under the trees—a drenched, solitary, struggling

figure, battling against the storm, and wondering, as might the leaf in which she had seen so poetic a type of her own fate, whither it was driving her! Oh, if she had but kept to the high-road—if she had not indulged in uncharitable thoughts of poor Harry, and grudged him the extra hour, she would now be seated at his side, or he at hers, bored, no doubt, and feeling very cross, but—safe.

Wind and rain beating in her face; the dragged skirts clinging hopelessly about her; the wet, weary feet plodding over the uneven ground. “If she could only reach the lane, and from thence the road!” The fields crossed, a lane was reached; but not the one she meant. She had taken the wrong turning from the wood—she had lost her way! One moment she paused irresolute. Was her position altogether ludicrous, or altogether pitiable? Should she sit down on the bank and cry, or— A look at her companion—his dejected mien, his dripping coat, the expression of his eyes

as they met hers, decided her, and she burst out laughing. "I won't go back, that I won't!" she cried, as if in answer to, and petulant defiance of, some wise voice of warning. "Here, at least, it is sheltered; and it must lead somewhere—lanes always do." On she toiled, and fortune favouring her, at last the lane did lead her somewhere, for it led her to a farmhouse, the door of which, protected by a heavy stone porch, stood invitingly open. Here was shelter, at least. She made for it at once, and stood, breathless and giddy, trying to remove from her smarting eyes the dripping ends of hair blown by the storm about her face. Looking down a stone passage, she saw through a half-open door the ruddy glow of firelight. "If it were not for Klint," she thought, "I would go in and ask for shelter.—To heel! Down, sir!" as the door opened wider yet and a girl came briskly along.

"Miss Raye!"

"Dolly!"

The recognition was mutual and very

cordial. Dolly Cross had been dairymaid, kitchenmaid, etc., etc., at the Cottage until within the last month, when, a sister having married, she had been recalled to the farm. She was a pretty, bright-faced, innocent-looking girl, with whom Rachel had fallen in love at her first visit to the dairy. Many a chat, and many a good laugh had they had together after that, the young lady donning the big holland apron, and helping the girl to churn and make the butter. And when Dolly left, with tears in her eyes—for she was a good girl, and fond of her mistress, and the cows and poultry—Rachel had given her a smart new ribbon that Cousin Charlie had brought her from Paris; not without a pang of regret, for even handsome ribbons were far more easily longed for than obtained. And so they had parted very good friends, and met again as such, a friend in need being a friend indeed; and never did young lady stand in greater need of a friend than did Miss Raye then.

“Oh dear, oh dear, if you’re not just wet



through and through!" said Dolly, as, having got Miss Raye into the kitchen and before its blazing fire, she passed her hand with something of respectful awe down the dripping serge. "You'll catch your death of cold."

But Dolly's mother—a rosy, round, good-natured woman, twice her age and rather more than twice her size—proposed, with a certain hesitation, that if the young lady would take off the garments that were forming a large artificial lake around her, and almost hiding her shivering figure behind a mist of steam, Dolly could easily lend her a change—"If Miss Raye wouldn't mind," put in the ex-dairymaid, colouring; for Rachel, though nobody in the eyes of Miss Graham, was a somebody to be looked up to in those of Dolly Cross.

Of course Miss Raye did not mind. Sack-cloth, with even its accompaniment of ashes, would have been preferable to that steaming weight of wool. So she was borne off in triumph to the spare room, a funny little

attic apartment in which she could but just stand upright ; and Dolly, bashful, but proud to be of service to Mrs. Lane's niece, soon appeared with the choicest treasures of her wardrobe. White cotton stockings, a striped petticoat, and a bright green stuff dress with plaited body, an attempt at a tunic, and a good deal of cheap fringe, reserved exclusively for Sunday wear.

Poor Rachel stared at it aghast. She had thought of sackcloth, and even ashes, but never of such a substitute for her fashionable serge as *that*. Carefully avoiding its touch, she fell back a step or two as Dolly held it out to her with much self-complacency.

"It's the best I have, Miss Rachel."

"Oh yes—thank you—but——"

"Perhaps it won't fit the young lady," suggested Mrs. Cross, coming to the rescue.

"I don't think it would," agreed Rachel demurely. "But if you could let me have just such a thing as you have on now, a skirt, and a loose jacket, with sleeves that I could tuck up comfortably at the elbow—I

always had such a wish to try one on—and a pair of grey, knitted stockings.”

Dolly hesitated, anxious to have her very best accepted; but her mother telling her to look sharp and do as the young lady bid her, she reluctantly substituted for the grand Sunday gown, a clean blue print fresh from the ironing-board, skirt, and loose jacket, the sleeves of which could be comfortably tucked up at the elbow—perfection!

In haste and with much laughter the metamorphose was accomplished. Skirt, jacket, grey worsted stockings, and over them the dainty little drawing-room slippers she was taking with her to Wickledean; and grey stockings and dainty slippers were plainly visible below the blue print skirt which, Dolly being dumpy and Rachel rather tall, was picturesquely short, admitting of a very good view of foot and ankle.

“And my hair!” laughed Rachel, as she shook it down, heavy and wet, about her.

That, too, with Dolly’s help, was soon and satisfactorily arranged for drying, loosely

twisted into two plaits—such long, broad, wonderful plaits, even Dolly and Dolly's mother exclaimed in admiration. At their praise Rachel thrilled, remembering how passionately she had once wished to be altogether beautiful, and for whose sake.

The plaits tied with a bit of bright scarlet braid, found in the depths of Dolly's work-box, the exceptional toilette was completed, and Rachel's only regret now was that in the small square of glass on the wall she could not see and admire it as a whole.

Dolly's round eyes opened very wide when she saw Miss Raye figuring before the glass. The green Sunday dress, with its fringe and tunic, might indeed be worthy of such rapt contemplation—but a cotton! Miss Raye, however, was of a very different opinion, and dissatisfied as she was too apt to be with the slight, unformed figure and little queer, brown face, she was far from being so now, and thought she had never looked so nice, except, perhaps, in her riding-habit. "I should make quite a pretty

peasant girl," she was saying to herself—quite forgetting that peasant girls do not wear their hair, however beautiful, down their backs any more than ladies do; that even print dresses cannot be always kept fresh and clean, or the skin pure and velvety as was hers—when Mrs. Cross re-entered the room.

"I've had the fire lit in the parlour, miss, and all your things have been hung to dry. Dolly'll bring you a cup of tea——" But here a dishevelled head appeared at the door, and a sepulchral voice announced that a gentleman was in the parlour, had walked straight in, and was asking for brandy. "Well, I never!" quoth Mother Cross, shaking her head disapprovingly. "That's always the way with the young gentlemen nowadays. It's brandy, brandy at all hours of the day—brandy or beer! Dolly, you run down and tell Mr. Henry Barnett——"

"Mr. Henry Barnett?" Rachel turned sharply round.

"Yes, miss; it'll be him, sure enough. He was coming about a cow that his father bought. It's a stoutish, fair gentleman, ain't it, Bella?"

"Yees," answered that individual, gaping and staring at the figure of the young lady dressed up in her mistress's working clothes.

"And he's got a brown overcoat, and talks short and quick, eh?"

"Yees," the round, scared eyes having reached the grey stockings and slippered feet.

"It's him, no doubt, by the figure and the coat, and his asking for the brandy. Well, I'll just go down and give him a drop of something hot to keep out the wet, and tell him that a young lady——" But Rachel interrupted her eagerly.

"Let me take in the tray. Mr. Barnett is my—cousin, you know" (she had again and again indignantly protested against the legitimacy of the familiar title), "and I was on my way to Wickledean."

Mrs. Cross, remembering certain observa-

tions made by Dolly on her first return from the Cottage, laughingly consented.

Had the brandy-loving gentleman been any one but Harry, Rachel would hardly have cared to appear before him in her present disguise, becoming though it was; but Mr. Barnett, junior, was in her mature eyes a mere boy, only worth a thought when some fun could be got out of him. And what fun it would be to surprise him now!—to appear suddenly before him in that out-of-the-way farm with short skirts and plaited locks, and tray in hand, a mocking Hebe, when he believed her miles away in the flying “express.” As to what people might say, for that she cared but little, or would have cared but little, had she allowed herself time for any other thought than that of Harry and his astonishment. He was always such fun. She would tease and amuse herself with him till her skirts were dry, and then he might conduct her the shortest way home, or to Wickledean, according as he amused or worried her.

One moment she paused at the parlour-door, before taking the tray from Dolly's hand, to smooth down the rather stiff folds of her gown and compose her countenance. She could hear the slow, heavy steps within pacing up and down the rather limited space. Dolly opened for her the door, and then closed it behind her.

A tall, broad-shouldered, auburn-haired gentleman. Yes, his coat, or rather shooting-jacket, brown. Miss Raye's eyes flashed up at him saucy and laughing, then dropped abashed. It was not Henry Barnett.



## CHAPTER XVI.

CARLTON TREHERNE was not one whose feelings could be easily aroused; there were but few events in life that could have taken him altogether by surprise; but when that parlour door opened, and Miss Rachel Raye, whom he had last seen in ball-room attire, and now believed far on her way to the distant rectory, appeared in the guise of a serving-wench, with short skirts, bare arms, and a tray, he was surprised. Had it been his cousin Evelyn Graham he would have been shocked, if not disgusted; it being Rachel Raye he was only genuinely and utterly surprised.

Her eyes upon the ground, his upon her, they stood thus for some time; then, with-

out a word, he came forward and took from her the tray. As he did so she saw that his hand was bound up in a handkerchief, which was saturated with blood.

With a faint, horrified exclamation she looked up into his face. It was very pale, and had on it a shadow of suffering.

“You are hurt.”

“A mere scratch, I believe. A branch fell as I was passing under it. I put up my hand to save my head.” As he spoke he bent on the wounded member a look that was the reverse of tender or compassionate. In the large brown eyes, however, there was tenderness and compassion both. The man she loved—and oh, how she loved him!—pale and wounded. She forgot herself, her shame, her embarrassment, to think only of him. He turned from her to the table, poured out and emptied a wine-glass of brandy, shuddered slightly as a spasm of pain ran through him, but smiled as he caught the girl’s look, yearning and sorrowful, fixed upon his face. How very pretty,

by-the-by, that look made her ; and not the look only, but even the ridiculous dress. What small, graceful feet the child had ! What soft, rounded arms ! How prettily the brown hair, left to the dictates of nature, fell about the low forehead, so light and wavy and curly after its late wetting !

Rachel could not remain long unconscious of the intentness of his gaze. He had looked at her in the same way before, and now, as then, her eyes sank slowly and lingeringly before his, and as slowly the colour faded from her face. She turned to leave the room.

“Don’t go.”

The tone was sharp and imperious as usual, but there was in it a very unusual ring ; for over him had come the sudden longing to keep the girl at his side. Involuntarily he had stretched out to her the wounded hand, as if the more surely to detain her. The movement was an unfortunate one. He turned paler still, bit his lip hard, and sat down on the big leathern chair

that had been drawn up to the fire for Miss Raye, feeling very sick and faint.

Rachel, obedient to his voice, had let go the door and was now standing beside him.

"If you would let me look at it—I am used to such things. We have so much to do in the way of nursing at home and in the parish."

He smiled again, well pleased, though, at the yearning pity in her eyes, and her soft, pleading eagerness. He had never seen her soft or pitiful before, but he was inclined to think that the character became her as well, if not better, than any other.

"If you would let me look at it," she persisted, "I am sure something could be done."

It was many years since he had been tended by a woman, since there had been any one to make a fuss over him; but he was rather in the humour for having a fuss made over him by that one woman, with the short, stiff skirt, and bare, soft arms, and long, wonderful, plaited hair. He had

thought that she was gone from him, probably for ever, and he had more than once during that day wished her back, and felt angry with himself for having allowed her to go thus easily. Moreover, his friend Sir Ralph had tormented him with his praises of her—her dancing, her eyes, her laugh—for nothing so raises the value of any object as the hearing it praised by another; and now, eyes and laugh, and the little feet that could dance so lightly, were his once more, and the longing grew always stronger to keep the girl at his side, a while at least. So he allowed her the rare privilege of removing the blood-soaked bandage, to accomplish which, not taking into consideration what might be the most proper or the most comfortable seat, but the one best fitted for the purpose, she chose the broad arm of the big leathern chair, so that the poor bruised hand might rest upon her lap. While, bending over it, she unwound and examined it, grave and intent, he was examining her, feature by feature, line by

line—the full blue veins in her temples, the moles on her cheek, the ends of hair that curled into the neck, and those other long, twisted ends that swept so far below her waist on the chair where he sat.

“It must be well bathed, and then properly bandaged with cold-water compresses. One of the boys at home hurt his hand in the same way, though not so badly, and I quite cured him.”

For the first time Rachel looked up, and found that Mr. Treherne was laughing at her; but he was still very pale, and his hand looked horrible, so she could not feel as angry with him as he deserved.

“I will go and fetch some water.”

But he objected. If the bell were rung, Mrs. Cross would bring what was wanted. Had it been his stately cousin who had proposed visiting the strange kitchen, even in his service, he would have objected, not deeming it the proper place for her. With regard to Rachel Raye, he had no such scruples; he would not let her go simply

because he would not lose sight of her just yet. When Mrs. Cross appeared, he gave his orders with the utmost gravity. If Miss Raye appeared that day in a new character, so, unquestionably, did he. Squire Treherne, sitting quietly in the farmhouse parlour, waited on by one woman, taken complete possession of by another, pitied, bandaged. Well might he shrug his broad shoulders, and wonder at himself and her ! He, the rude, rough, woman-despising savage, reduced to abject submission to a woman ; and that woman, hitherto a wild, untamed, half-civilized creature, transformed into a Sister of Mercy !

Wonderful things had Mrs. Cross to relate to Dolly on her return to the kitchen. It was not Mr. Barnett, after all, but Squire Treherne, whose tenants they were, and whom they honoured above all other created beings, the minister not even excepted ; and he had hurt his hand very badly, and Miss Raye had been seeing to it. She was a nice young lady, to be sure ! And

she'd just take in the water, and the lotion that cured Giles, the cowman, and Miss Raye might as well have her tea taken in, and maybe the squire would like a cup too, etc., etc.

Water and lotion appeared just as Rachel, still standing very close to the big chair, though no longer on its arm—that being no longer necessary—was giving a laughing explanation of her rather startling appearance and disguise, when she should have been quietly travelling to the distant rectory.

“Dear, dear, it is a bad place!” cried Mrs. Cross, who, like Rachel, was full of compassion, and like her, too, knew herself to be rather a favourite of the squire, her father having for years served his father as bailiff, and he himself having danced as a boy at her wedding. “But I’ll just give it a bathe, and put on a lotion that’ll cure it in no time.”

This was hardly what Carlton Treherne had bargained for. It was to have about



him the touch of hands smaller and softer than hers, if not much whiter—of warm, tender, fluttering fingers that gave him a feeling which, undefined, was yet actual enjoyment—that he had submitted, for the first time in his life, perhaps, to be made a fuss about. He turned on Rachel a half-amused, half-reproachful look ; but she had been suddenly seized with a shy or teasing fit, and, without responding in any way to his appeal, sat herself down at the table, her bare arms crossed upon it, her head bent forward anxiously, to watch the operation. It was no pleasant one to watch—the black, bruised, bleeding flesh, upon which the lightest touch must have been agony. Not a muscle of the man's face changed—it still wore its cool, mocking smile—and not once had the grey eyes been removed from the girl whose presence had all at once become a necessity to him—to the passing hour, at least.

The bathing accomplished, next came the bandaging; but here Rachel, her lip quiver-

ing, her eyes dilating, sprang forward. What put it into her foolish head to think that she could do better by the poor wounded hand than the comfortable, experienced matron who doctored not only the whole farm, but half the neighbourhood? She did think so, however, or else she acted upon impulse, for she started forward, breathing out with tremulous eagerness—

“Let me do that. I think I could, and—you might hurt him.”

“Let her do it,” said the squire, shortly ; and that decided the question.

So he had once more got the girl to his side, or rather to his feet this time, for she had quietly assumed Mrs. Cross’s humble position, and was kneeling before him ; and though he turned pale and shivered at the first touch of her fingers, it was not with pain, or from any other cause to be explained thus easily.

She, absorbed in her work, he in the contemplation of her, the smile passed from his lips to his eyes, making of it a thing far

more pleasant. Watching her, he wondered, with a sudden warming of his blood, and strange throbbing of all his veins, what could be the particular attraction of that woman, and that one woman only, that censure, slight, try to forget her as he might and did, she had but to appear to draw him to her at once, and irresistibly. Was it mere animal magnetism, or a subtle piece of witchcraft? and did she deserve, like some hapless damsel of old, to be burned alive for having dared to disturb the peace of mind and true English phlegm of the master of Treherne? Was it her eyes that were to blame? the little white teeth that clenched themselves so readily? her hair? Ah, that was wonderful, certainly. One long sweep of it, drooping gradually forward as she bent over his hand, now lay across his knee. Intent upon her task, she did not notice it; he did, and it had for him something of the intoxicating feeling of a caress.

The bandaging operation satisfactorily performed, Rachel gave such a deep sigh of

relief, and looking up into his face for the first time, smiled. "Did I hurt you?" she whispered, not at all in her usual clear, brisk tones.

"I don't know, I'm sure," carelessly and with a shrug of his shoulders. "Anyhow," as if in answer to her look of concern, "it feels all right now, and won't trouble either me or you any more, I hope." Whilst speaking, he had slowly lifted from his knee the brown mass of hair that lay there, and held it towards him. "I have often wondered how all this would look uncoiled from about your head, and also—whether it was all your own, or more than half some one's else, as is the way with ladies' heads nowadays."

"I am glad that you have seen it as it really is," she answered—not saucily, as she might have spoken at any other time after such a remark, but quietly and softly. "I am very vain and foolish about my hair; perhaps because papa always took such notice of it, and would kiss it much oftener

than he did me. He used to say that he had never seen such long hair but once, and that, too, was fair. Mine was quite fair as a child, you know."

"I used to think my mother's hair the finest I had ever seen. It was of a pale gold colour, rather curly at the end, like yours, but straight and smooth over the forehead."

The clatter of cups and spoons outside, followed by the appearance of the tea-tray and the pleasing information that Miss Raye's things were all at the fire and likely to be very soon dry, and that the weather was clearing up beautiful. Mr. Treherne rose, stretched himself as if weary, and walked to the window. Rachel's heart gave a great jump, then grew very still. Would he go away and leave her behind; shake hands and bid her good-bye, and go away, little dreaming, perhaps, that they might never, would probably never meet again? "If you'd take a cup of tea before you go, Mr. Treherne——" It was not she who had spoken; she could not have uttered

a word to save her life, or, which seemed of more importance at the moment, to keep him.

“Certainly, if Miss Raye will kindly see in me one of the nice old parish women in whose service she is so zealous, and pour me out a cup.”

And Miss Raye, brightening up at once, and sparkling and dimpling all over, promised the cup of tea and every other privilege enjoyed by the very nicest of her nice old women. Her point gained, and Mr. Treherne no longer pale and suffering—not so very much, at least—her mood changed suddenly and completely. Dropping the Sister of Mercy phase, quite unconscious of the very favourable impression it had made, she was more than ever, perhaps, the wild, untamed, half-civilized creature in whom Mr. Treherne professed to find so much more to blame than to praise. She laughed and made him laugh, even against his will; but she made him no more soft speeches, gave him no more soft looks, or

looks indeed of any kind, his eyes, expressive at all times, trying in vain to draw hers to meet them. Altogether, she was more unsatisfactory and provoking even than usual.

The ball being the last place where they had met, it was naturally mentioned, by her first.

"You seem fond of dancing," he remarked coldly and resentfully.

She answered eagerly enough that she was, more especially when she got such a partner as Sir Ralph Randal.

"You danced with him half the night, I believe."

"Four times only," regretfully; "but, then, he was not introduced to me until I had wasted half the night."

Carlton Treherne muttered something under his moustache, not amiable or sympathetic, though, rather the reverse. She took no notice of it, therefore, but presently observed, with more than her usual abruptness, "I thought you would ask me to

dance," and gave him the first direct look with which he had been favoured since she rose from her lowly post at his feet. But persistently as he had before tried to draw her eyes to his, he did not somehow care to meet them just then.

"You were so well guarded on all sides that there was no approaching you."

The great eyes flashed dark and passionate. It was well, perhaps, he had avoided meeting them. Had she not gone there to see him, to dance with him? Had she not waited with feverish impatience, seeing nothing, caring for nothing, till he entered the ball-room? Had she not watched his slow, leisurely approach with clasped hands and straining eyes, and heart that beat so fast that it became actual pain? Had she not longed, as she had never, perhaps, done in her life before, to feel herself drawn to his side, nestling close to him if but for one little dance, before she left him for ever, going back to the old dull life, and leaving him to marry Miss Graham? And, after all,



he had come up, treated her to a few words and a careless smile, that seemed to mock her foolish, passionate longing to be taken notice of, and then turned on his heel and gone back to the fashionably dressed cousin whom she almost hated for her fairness and plumpness and stolidity, and the cold, haughty look of the grey-blue eyes.

For some time Rachel did not answer. She did not mean to quarrel with him—it was not worth while. She would laugh and talk, and be happy—happy in the mere fact of his presence, so happy to have him all to herself once more—happy, as she had already been once or twice, as she could never be again.

“I was leaving Didford to-day, and I wished to bid you good-bye. I had already taken a tender farewell of the dear old oak——”

“You were there—when?” interrupting her eagerly. “I have been there more than once lately, hoping to meet you. Why have you avoided the park?”

Again her eyes flashed, and her breast heaved. *She* avoided it! Ah, well, never mind about all that now; it was past and done with, and so would everything else be very soon. She busied herself with the teapot, and laughingly turned the conversation.

Not once had it flagged, when Dolly, entering, announced that Miss Raye's things were all quite dry and ready to put on.

Rachel's face fell. She cast a regretful look at the stiff skirt, the grey stockings, the comfortably tucked-up sleeves. There, too, was the big leathern chair, and the old-fashioned stone hearth, upon which it stood. How like a dream it all appeared! And was it over—all over, and for ever? She did not look at her companion, for she knew that he was looking at her; but it was of him she was thinking. What were all these things without the one dear image that would for ever be associated with the thought of them?

She rose, not laughing now, or even

smiling. "It seems quite fine again, and it's getting late. I must be going."

"Where?—to Wickledean?" in a short, stern tone.

"No; home."

She had been going to Wickledean to avoid him, Carlton Treherne—and there he was! She quite forgot her demurely expressed wish to bid good-bye to the Barnetts in general, and poor Harry in particular.

"I will go with you. Make haste and change your things, and let's be off."

Another reprieve. He would be hers still, all her own, a little longer. A walk across the fields, and woods, and shady lanes. After the storm none would be abroad but themselves. As to there being any danger in the lonely evening walk, of that she did not think. She had not sought a meeting; on the contrary, she had done her best to avoid it. It had been sent to her, together with the storm; and what harm could it do? He would be none the worse

for it, or Miss Graham either, for he would forget her just as easily as if they had not met and been happy together, when once she was gone.

The plaits were soon coiled once again about the little head—rather more loosely, and with less care than usual; but, then, she was in a fever of impatience to be off, and so very anxious not to keep him waiting.

“Haven’t I been quick?” she cried, as she joined him in the porch, looking so bright and eager and happy, and therefore so pretty, that he was more than ever content to have her at his side, instead of knowing her miles away, far out of his reach, in the distant rectory.

“Are you afraid of wetting your feet? If not, we might cut across the fields; it would be pleasanter, I think.”

She thought so too. People would be passing along the road; and she wanted to have him to herself—all to herself, that one last hour at least.

So they struck across the fields.

At first Rachel walked along briskly enough, trying, poor child, by her quaint, original remarks—not that she was in the least conscious of their originality—to amuse her stern, and always rather silent, companion. But by-and-by she, too, grew silent, and her steps slow and heavy.

“You are tired,” Carlton Treherne said suddenly, looking down at her. “Take my arm.”

She took it gladly, for she was very tired. A strange languor was stealing over her. The excitement and utter sleeplessness of the past night, the violence of the storm against which she had had to battle, the emotions of the last two hours, had subdued even her eager spirit. Every now and then a shiver would run through the slight, weary frame. A faintness, against which she did not even try to struggle, made all around seem shadowy and indistinct; but through it all she was quite happy and content.

They had reached the wood, and the

very tree upon which she had sat and dreamed, of him.

“Let us sit down here. You are in no particular hurry to get home, are you? A rest will do you good.”

“Is it not getting late?”

The tone was not combative at all, but soft and languid. She felt far too weak to oppose his will, whatever that will might be: he might take her home, or make her sit there, she did not much mind which.

He made her sit there. She should not again escape him. He must have one or two questions answered before he let her go. The lost found is, as we all know, doubly valued. She had been lost to him, and through his own fault—of that he was quite aware; and in a fit of savage ill-humour, leaving his friends, baronet and barrister, to entertain each other, he had gone off to see what a long, solitary walk would do for him. It had done very much for him, as we have seen, but he was resolved that it should do still more.

He contemplated her awhile in silence ; then asked abruptly, " When do you leave Didford ? "

Waiting for her answer, which, however, did not come, he saw her shrink together ; then slowly, from where she sat at his side, she turned up at him a look so soft and wistful in the languid eyes that, strong, rough, hard man though he was, he felt touched. Poor little thing ! she could be saucy and defiant and provoking, exciting his just wrath and indignation ; but she was neither the one nor the other now : the pale evening light that fell on the little upturned face subdued each delicate line into softness and languor. Never had she been so wonderfully, so irresistibly attractive to Carlton Treherne as at that moment. Meeting the eyes that were searching his, deep, languid, and passionate, a great and sudden weakness fell on the strong heart—a longing to take the child to himself ; to feel the arms that, soft and bare, had leant against his knee, close, warm and tender,

about his neck ; to have her all his own—arms, eyes, and hair, and saucy, winsome ways ; to take possession of her then and there, and never again let her go.

She had not answered his question, but bending forward and away from him, she had drawn Klint's big head on to her lap and was stroking it.

"You seem mightily fond of the dog ; such an ugly brute, too," spoken savagely. He had always been jealous of the affection lavished upon the favourite. "Ill-tempered, ill-favoured, I can't think what the attraction can be."

"He is fond of me," she answered wearily. "He loves me better than anything else in the world. He was papa's dog ; at least, papa saved his life. It was when he was travelling in Denmark—Klint is a Danish name, you know—he saw him dragging a cart, when suddenly a heavy waggon came tearing along—the horse had run away, he believed—the cart was upset, poor Klint knocked down. Every one said the dog



was dead; so his master unharnessed him, dragged him to the side of the road, and left him. Papa, after examining him, felt sure that he was only stunned, had him taken to his hotel, got him round, and afterwards gave him to me."

"And you take him with you wherever you go? A safe, and, at the same time, rather a dangerous, companion. His growl was, I believe, my first introduction to you."

"He never growls at you now."

"No, poor wretch! And now that I know his history and plebeian origin, I'll overlook his uncouth manners, and not again grudge him your favour; for I have been jealous of him, almost as much so as of that confoundedly good-looking friend of mine with whom you danced four times."

Carlton Treherne, for the first time in his life, pleading jealousy!—with a certain careless haughtiness of tone, it is true, but still admitting a feeling for which he had always professed the most sovereign contempt.

He paused, waiting for some response, saucy or tender—he did not much care which ; but none came.

“Rachel,”—the girl’s name dropping softly and unceremoniously from his lips—“why have you so often made me jealous? Why would you not dance with me? Why did you avoid me? Why were you going away just when I most care to keep you?”

Still she made him no answer. She would not reproach him by justifying herself. He knew it all quite as well as she did. He knew that if she had gone to the park she would not have met him ; that if she had sacrificed to him every other partner, he would not have danced with her. She was not angry with him, for being cold and cruel then, or warm and impassioned now. He was all her own, for that one hour at least. He might call her Rachel, and say fond, foolish things. What did it matter? It would be a memory for the future—nothing more—it could be nothing more.

“Never mind about that now. Don’t let’s

talk of the past; that's all over and done with."

"Shall we talk of the future, then, Rachel?"

"No, no! not of the future. I—don't want to talk of anything. I'm—so tired."

This was said almost tearfully; and scarce knowing what she did, she drew nearer to him, until her shoulder touched his arm. She was, as she had said, so tired. The old faintness, too, was creeping over her, the blood throbbed heavily through her veins, her eyes were closing, her ideas were growing confused, the fever of exhaustion was upon her. Involuntarily, she nestled closer, as if for support.

Can it be for a moment doubted that the support was given; that the strong arm closed about her; that the heart, of which she had gained more entire possession than he or she was aware, took her to itself—not quietly, restfully, but with a sudden passionate strain, clutching her to him, as if the frenzy of the moment alone was theirs?

She did not struggle against his superior strength, or the feelings that had altogether mastered them both. She did not reason or think ; she only felt. She had never loved any other man but the one. It did not at the moment strike her as a thing wrong or unnatural that the dear arms should be about her ; that the weary head rested against him ; that, in return for so much love and sorrow, so many secret tears, he should at last speak to her kindly and tenderly, when, weak and helpless, she could no longer speak to him. Not that his words, even now, were so very tender—rather, perhaps, the reverse.

“Why do you make me care for you, child ? I have done my best not to. Or if I must care for you, why are you not everything I could wish ? Why do you haunt me, and make me long after you ? ”

“I couldn’t help it,” she whispered, piteously ; and the strong man, who could battle so sturdily against trials, whether of feeling or circumstance mattered not,

little guessed how bitter a conflict lay in the simple, childish words.

“ Couldn’t you ? I’m not so sure of that. Why, child, isn’t it the business of your life to attract and make us men care for you ? Carlton Treherne, Ralph Randal, that fellow Barnett, no matter whom—just the first that happens to fall in your way.”

It must have been that Rachel was very tired, that her lids were heavy, and her heart beat with dull, slow strokes ; for she did not start up and defend herself, as she was generally so very ready to do. She only lifted her head, languidly enough, from where it lay against him, and once more her eyes searched his—not passionately this time, speculatively rather.

“ Do you think this of all women ? Do you think it of—Miss Graham ? ”

He laughed, but coloured too. He had never indulged in an uncharitable thought of his cousin Evelyn since the day when he had first carried her, a pretty, plump little doll, in his boy’s arms.

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"Miss Graham?—oh dear, no! She is solidity itself, I should think; not capricious, provoking, maddening, not a bit. She'd never slip away from you, torment you, spoil your life. Hers is a character to be relied on."

Rachel gave a great, deep sigh, but still her eyes searched his.

"Well, little one, what are you so grave about? Are you jealous of Miss Graham? As jealous as I was of Ralph Randal yesterday, eh? I really think that she is as handsome for a woman as he is for a man. What do you say?"

"Nothing. Don't let's talk about them now," Rachel answered, with something of her old petulance, regretting, perhaps, the question that had brought the image of the fair-haired cousin so vividly before him.

"All right."

He laughed again, but drew her closer. She was jealous of the woman who was handsomer than herself, naturally enough, and he liked her all the better for the feel-

ing—a feminine weakness to be applauded rather than condemned, in *her* at least.

Just then came over to them the distant striking of a church clock. How strangely it sounded in the ears of both, reminding them that there were other things in life besides each other and the solemn hush of the autumn evening.

“How late it is! I must be going home.”

She withdrew herself slowly from him. She would be quite content now to let him go, or to walk home quietly by his side; but he was of a very different opinion. He caught her to him again, holding her close and sure with one arm, while his disengaged hand, framing the little face, held it up to his own.

There was no resisting him. She drooped her head backwards, and closed her eyes, so as not to meet his look.

“One kiss, Rachel, and you shall go. Give me one kiss.”

And hardly knowing what she did, her will entirely resigned to his, she gave it him.

## CHAPTER XVII.

THE storm, coming on so suddenly and with such violence, had caused no little distress at the Cottage. Mrs. Lane was nervous and talkative. She never could bear a storm. "Thunder and lightning, wind, and all such dreadful things!" Uncle Joe was silent, but alarmed—alarmed for his late roses, his shrubs, his young trees, his niece Rachel. Though he told the mistress that she must have got to Wickledan before the storm came on, he was far from sure of the fact. She might or she might not. And so, when the storm was comfortably over (he would not have risked Toby's safety, even for Rachel's), he proposed—to satisfy the old woman, if his assurances would not—to drive over, see the girl,



and perhaps bring her back with him. The chaise, therefore, was ordered out, and driven down to Wickledean. Rachel was not there, as we know; but the Barnetts, on hearing that she had intended walking through the wood, thought at once of the farm as a probable, and indeed the only available, place of shelter. Thither Uncle Joe proceeded, and learnt that the young lady had been there, and Squire Treherne too, and that they had left together about an hour or so before. "Then they will be home by this time," decided Uncle Joe, and he turned down the lane. But he had not gone far when, skirting the road, he heard a deep, hoarse bark that could only proceed from one canine throat, he verily believed. Rachel's dog was somewhere in the vicinity. He stopped short and shouted her name. An answer was shouted back in a deep, powerful voice that he also recognized, and ere long Carlton Treherne appeared, and with him Rachel.

"Well, my dear, we've been in a pretty

fright about you. And so you were caught in the storm after all? It's rather late for you to be out; and I'm sure we're very much obliged to Mr. Treherne for seeing you home. But we needn't trouble him any further," and he looked deprecatingly at the master of Treherne, really ashamed of having burdened him with the child's company.

"I'm so tired!" was all Rachel said, and as if in answer to the tremulous complaint, she was almost lifted into the carriage by the strong arms that seemed loth to resign possession of her. And as he still held her hand, Mr. Treherne contrived to whisper in her ear, as Uncle Joe was whistling and chirruping to Toby: "You must meet me in the park to-morrow morning before breakfast. You *must*. Do you understand? Just over the bridge by the stile——"

"I know," she interrupted him almost impatiently.

Mrs. Lane was quite shocked at the girl's worn, weary look, at her heavy eyes and

feverish lips and listless step. She insisted upon a foot-bath with plenty of mustard, and hot lemonade to be taken in bed. "And now go to sleep, like a good child; for it's as likely as not that you've taken your death of cold."

Rachel, half asleep already, put up her hot face to be kissed, and not only went to sleep then and there, but did not awake till daylight.

Meanwhile, Carlton Treherne had gone home, relieved the anxiety of his friends, apologized for the spoiling of a good dinner, smoked, discussed horseflesh with Sir Ralph, politics with the barrister, had a turn at billiards, and been shamefully beaten, his hand being quite disabled, and retired, ostensibly to rest, but in point of fact, to toss about more restless than he had ever perhaps been in his life before. The pain in his hand, of which he had scorned to take any notice, made him feverish; so did certain thoughts which went surging through his brain.

"Well, it will be all settled by this time to-morrow," he said to himself, "and then she will, perhaps, let me sleep in peace."

The fact was that, sitting with the girl alone in the wood, holding her to him, feeling so strangely excited, longing for her to be more to him than any other woman had ever been, wondering at her softness, her weakness, the deep passion of the half-closed eyes, he had suddenly but definitely resolved to make her his wife. It was for that he had arranged a meeting, and he already felt himself as much bound as if his word had been passed. "Poor child!" he argued; "it must have been with some such thought that she had allowed him so much freedom, that she had nestled up to him, invited his caresses, given him so unreservedly the kiss he had asked for." The depth of her feeling for him he did not care to fathom. What mattered it so long as she pleased him, and he cared for her? That he headed just at present her list of eligibles he did not for a moment doubt. She had

from the first sought his notice, thrown herself in his way. She had been, and still was, jealous of Evelyn Graham; and her conduct at the farm had been altogether tender and demonstrative. Had they not happened to meet so opportunely—had she gone off without a last word, as she had been so very near doing, he would soon, no doubt, have been struck off her list. The object of every woman's life, he verily believed, was to get married; and if the girl had a fancy for him, why, the master of Treherne was as good a match as any she could make—better than any she probably would make. So he was fully justified in saying, as he did, that a few hours would see it all settled, and his mind set at rest.

These were some of the thoughts that went surging through his heated brain. But there were others, too—thoughts of the little weird face that had looked so closely into his, rising from his breast to confront him; of the soft, bare arms that had pressed

his knee; of the warm, trembling fingers that had made his flesh quiver and his face pale as the pain could not, for which she had so pitied him; of the brown, bewildering glory of her hair that he had held in his hand and fondled; of the grey stocking and the small, restless foot. So Carlton Treharne lay and dreamt of the woman he was about to make his wife—not of any noble quality for which he might desire her; not of the long years of close and tried companionship that lay before them; not of the blessing that might be granted to his life through her love; but of the moment when, having asked her to be his wife, she would belong to him—she, the only woman for whom he had ever felt anything like passion. Most certainly he did not regard the step he was about to take in its most serious light, one involving the happiness or misery of two lives. That a woman could thus influence his future, or, indeed, influence it in any particular way, was a conclusion to which he never could have come by any

natural process of reasoning. His speculations did not as yet extend beyond the first day. He would propose, and she would accept him, in whatever way she pleased. The acceptance of a husband was, after all, a mere matter of business—the business of a woman's life. And then, later on in the day, in the still evening hour—the still, solemn, shadowy autumn evening—she should meet him again in the park, beneath their favourite oak, and there they would sit together so long as he might see fit to keep her; for she would be his indeed then, his to command as well as to fondle. Nestling close up to him she must sit, the great eyes deepening, softening, flashing, changing every moment, uplifting themselves every now and then to his; and slowly bending down to meet the upturned face, his kiss would drop once more upon her lips—those red, sensitive, mocking, defiant lips that could laugh, and pout, and taunt, and awaken passion with every wilful curve.

So he lay and dreamt of the woman whom, spite of doubts and fears, of hard, and too often unjust, suspicions, he had resolved to make his wife—the mistress of his home, the companion of his life, the mother of his children. And this, not because he recognized in her so much that was true and noble and good, but because of something in the look of her eyes, the touch of her hand, the wayward play of her lips.

And this is what men call love—the most fleeting, but for the time being, the strongest of all earthly passions ; so strong, because an irresistible animal attraction, an unreasoning, overmastering impulse of nature, the magnetic power that one body will have over another. Hence the many fatal mistakes made—so natural, yet apparently so extraordinary ; the sacrifice of all the comfort and well-being of a sober, rational life, for the gratification of an unreasoning impulse. Passion dead, it is easy enough to call yourself a fool, easier still to call your



neighbour one; but you both of you only obeyed a perfectly natural impulse, and you would do the same thing over again to-morrow, if you got the chance.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

EARLY one autumn morning—early, at least, considering that it was an autumn morning, and rather a dull one—two persons might have been seen—though not by the same pair of eyes—starting from an opposite direction. But at every step the distance between them lessened; evidently, therefore, they were making for the same point. Both walked with heads erect, and firm, elastic tread, and certainly no two persons ever went along more briskly and directly to meet their fate, whatever that fate might be.

When the intervening space had so considerably lessened that only a bridge on the one side, and a clump of trees on the other,

separated them, the woman's step grew slower, that of the man more rapid. He reached the stile first. "What if she were to fail me, after all!" was his first impatient thought. "There is no piece of mischief, I verily believe, of which she is not capable——" The sentence was hardly completed, for there, on the further side of the bridge, stood Rachel Raye.

"Do you know that I did not feel at all sure of you this morning?" was his greeting as they crossed the bridge together.

"You told me to come; so I came."

A most dutiful remark, and a very good opening to what was to follow.

"Will you always do what I tell you?"

No answer.

"Well, then, sit down upon that stile just as you sat when I came upon you so unexpectedly that first morning. Do you remember? When you condescended to keep me company, not having yet learnt to snub and avoid me."

She perched herself on the stile, then

looked down on him with a careless, and more than half scornful, smile.

"There, will that do? Is the attitude quite the same? If not, I am open to corrections. But I have really sat on so many stiles since then, that I can't recall the exact pose I may have assumed."

Something in the words, or the tone of her voice, jarred upon him, and, looking at her, something, too, in the expression of her face struck him as strange and unpleasant. It was hard, cold, and set. What had come to the girl? Was she resenting on him the tender episode of the wood? He would soon set her mind at rest upon that point. A word, and she would once more be on his breast, in his arms, at his feet. The word was spoken; not one word only, but just as many as were absolutely necessary to make his meaning clear. He told her that he loved her, had loved her from the very first, and therefore wished to make her his wife. His tone was hardly less lordly and imperious than usual.

Had the words broken from him involuntarily, as they were so near doing the night before; had he not looked upon a proposal as such a mere matter of business, it might have been less steady, and more passionate. But in Rachel's answer there was passion enough for both, quiet and concentrated, but therefore all the more impressive.

"Then, if you have loved me for months, and think me worthy to be your wife, why did you not tell me so before? Why did you let me go away without a word? Why did you not dance with me at the ball, as you did with your cousin, Miss Graham? Why did you avoid going to the oak, where we had so often met, for fear of seeing me there? And I was there. I went day after day, hoping to find you. They told me that you would never marry any one out of your set, and I quite believed them; but I longed to see you, and I went——"

"Miss Raye — Rachel — what do you mean?"

He might well ask; he might well wonder

what the girl meant by getting up a scene instead of a blush, and pouring out a torrent of bitter words instead of the one faltering "Yes," that would make her the mistress of Treherne. She had sprung down from the stile on which his lover's caprice had placed her, and stood before him, the delicate nostrils dilating, her cheeks on fire, her eyes flaming, all the fierce emotions of the last few weeks, pride, anger, scorn, mortification, love, despair, looking out of them.

"I might ask what you meant; but I need not ask, because I know," she laughed—a little scornful laugh, while up into the great, wide, open eyes came welling the salt, bitter tears. "You were cruel and unjust to me because you did not choose to care for me. You tried hard not to, and when you could not help it—for I know you couldn't—you tried to think ill of me to make it easier. You said to yourself that I was not like Miss Graham."

"Miss Graham again. Why should you

be jealous of her? I never cared for her as I do for you."

"I know you never did, and you never will; not even if you make her your wife, thinking her so much more worthy of you." And as two great tears rolled slowly down the burning cheeks, a wild, rapturous light filled their place in the brown, uplifted eyes. His love—as much, at least, as he was capable of—was hers; he loved no other woman as he loved her, much as he had wronged and misjudged her!

"She will never provoke or shock you, but neither will you ever be as happy with her as you were those few hours with me; and you will never quite forget me, though you may be very glad that I did not take you at your word."

Carlton Treherne started, and drew together his dark brows in a heavy frown. He knew now to what her wild words tended—a rejection of himself, and his brilliant, generous offer. "This is madness," he

said, almost sternly, and he put out his hand as if to touch her ; but she drew back, stretching both arms before her to keep him off.

“No, it is no madness ! It was madness to wish for your love, to think you would care for mine, to go after you when you did not want me, to feel so angry and jealous when you would not take any notice of me ; and it would be madness to marry you, when I know I could be nothing to you, and you would make me—miserable ! ”

“Why, child, what have I done to you ? What are you afraid of ? ”

There was a throb of pity in the man’s voice ; a throb of pity, too, in his heart. A creature so childish, yet with all a woman’s passions ; so playful, and so vindictive ; so fond one day, so violent the next. “Tell me, Rachel, what are you afraid of ? ” And his voice, dropped to a whisper, was softer than it had ever before been—when speaking to her, at least. But in vain he searched the small, resolute face—there



was no sign of relenting there ; and her voice was far more steady than his, as she went on, her look answering to his, full and unabashed.

“Of myself, and of you. How could I trust you? Only a few hours ago you had no idea of marrying me ; you let me go without a word, or even a wish to retain me. And you were quite right. I am not fit to be your wife. You would never care to understand me, or that I should understand you. You only think of me as a child ; when I ceased to be that, I should cease to be anything to you. You would let me amuse you till you tired of me, and then you would go your way, and I should be jealous, and wicked, and miserable ; and if I showed it, or tried to make you jealous, or to be indifferent, and happy my own way, you would blame and despise me, and wish that you had married Miss Graham, as they all say you will, and not been led into anything so wrong and foolish as marrying a girl just because she happened to be caught

in a storm, and had to change her dress, and pour out your tea, and——”

But here, forcibly struck by the absurdity of the situation, spite of anger and bitterness and stormy passion, she stopped short and burst out laughing. Never had that laugh, pleasant at all times, struck so pleasantly on Carlton Treherne's ear. She was herself once more, bright, tempestuous as a stormy day; but he would soon subdue her. Never, much as he had often been attracted by her, had he so longed to have her in his arms, and silence her sharp tongue with his kisses. But as he once more tried to touch her, roughly almost, in his rising passion, she shook him off. Hers, to-day, was the strength, a strength of will and purpose, there was no resisting.

“No, you shall not touch me; you shall not kiss me again as you did yesterday. I don't think you should have done it because I was weak and tired, and did not know what to say. But it doesn't matter now. I thought it was the last time that

we should ever be alone together, and I should have been stronger and more prudent, perhaps, if"—she paused, red and abashed, looked away from him, then straight into his face—"if I had not cared for you so much, and been so sorry to lose you."

There was another challenge—a full, unreserved avowal of love, spoken by the red, tremulous lips that had kissed him. Was it not now his turn to speak? He could be eloquent enough at times. It was, indeed, upon his oratorical powers he counted to make himself a name in the world. As an M.P., his voice should carry weight; but lovemaking was less in his line than politics, and though now quite in earnest, his words were short and few, and far from eloquent. Such as they were, however, had they but been spoken before those weeks of estrangement, that had rendered so impassable the gulf that already parted them, the poor child would not only have been satisfied, but foolishly, rapturously

happy. It was so little she had ever expected of him—a look, a word, an amused smile, a pressure of the hand; and therefore it had seemed to her so doubly hard and cruel and unjust when even that little had been suddenly withdrawn.

It was of all this she was thinking, and bitterly enough. But as she stood silent and very still, her eyes turned once more from his face to the ground, her colour coming and going with startling but very effective rapidity, he believed that the storm had spent itself, or that his words had prevailed; and drawing nearer, he said, in the half-coaxing, half-imperious tone in which you might speak to a spoilt child, in which he had so often spoken to her, awing her into submission, even against her wayward will—

“Why, child, you don’t think I’m going to give you up because you tell me to? Go home now, and come to me again this evening, under our old oak; and don’t be angry or jealous, for I would give up twenty cousin Evelyns rather than lose you.”

She shook her head, and smiled a sad, enigmatical little smile. How much better she knew him and his requirements than he did himself! Rachel Raye, the attractive plaything, the wilful, provoking little love—Evelyn Graham, the suitable wife; the one the interest of the hour, the other the companion of a life. Neither could fill the place of the other. Miss Graham would never be his love; she, Rachel, could never, dare never, be his wife.

“You will come to me this evening, under the oak—won’t you?”

“No.”

She paused; then, catching at her breath, went on, speaking yet more rapidly. Something had still to be said, that, when they were for ever parted, he might no longer misjudge her; and, saying it, her anger rose and her tears too, bravely as she fought against them.

“When I used to meet you, it was with no idea of your ever marrying me. I liked to be with you, and you always seemed

pleased to have me. You had said so only the last time we were together, and after that you never came again. I know what you thought; but you were wrong. Miss Graham may marry you for a position, for I don't believe she could really care for any one, if she tried; so much the better for her!"

This truly feminine little piece of revenge taken on the unconscious rival, who was to be Carlton Treherne's wife—Rachel had quite made up her mind to that—did her more good than anything else could possibly have done. It dried up her tears, and her voice was much steadier, and not half so indignant, as she went on—

"Yes, Miss Graham may marry you for what you can give her, and most probably will; but it was very unkind of you to think so badly of me, when it was only of you I thought; and of nothing else. I always tried to forget your position—because it frightened me, and made me feel that I could never be anything to you. You

thought it was that I wanted; and it is just that that parts us. If you were Henry Barnett, or Cousin Charlie, I should marry you even now, I dare say, and—be very happy for a month, and jealous and miserable all my life afterwards.”

Again she stopped short, blushed, and laughed up defiantly in his face. It was that mocking, provoking, cruel little laugh that he had from the first found so irresistible. She should not give him up, and carry away with her smiles, blushes, and dimples to plague and brighten some other fellow's life. For the third time he asked her to marry him, and promised that she should not be made jealous and miserable, but should have as happy a life as any little wife need wish for. He would have added more; but broke off, struck by the unusual shadow of solemnity that was creeping over the childish face, and into the great un-childlike eyes.

“It's too late for you to ask me now. I couldn't marry you, not if I wished it ever

so much. When you avoided me because you would have nothing more to do with me, because you thought me dangerous, and though you might like me well enough for a wife, you could not bear to think of me as the mistress of Treherne, filling the place your mother did, who was so beautiful and clever"—here the poor child nearly broke down, but the solemn feeling that was in her heart kept her voice clear and her look steadfast—"when you tried to despise me, because you couldn't help thinking of me—I swore that, come what might, I would never go to Treherne as its mistress."

"Nonsense," interrupted Mr. Carlton Treherne, impatiently. 'A child's vow, made in a moment of pique, that should not part them, whatever importance she might pretend to attach to it.

"It did not seem so hard then, for you were cruel and unjust to me; and just when I felt it most, came a letter from papa. He had heard some gossip about our being so much together, and he wrote about it. I



know how stern he can be, and that nothing would make him so angry as for me to marry out of the working class to which he belongs and of which he is so proud. He would never allow it." And the red lip swelled, and the eyes dilated, and the slight figure drew itself up instinctively, as if glorying in the man's honest pride.

After that Carlton Treherne said no more, at least in persuasion or entreaty. He, too, drew himself up to his full height, which was considerable, as we know. The spirit of the absent, unknown father, rising so suddenly and unexpectedly between him and his little love, parted them more effectually than aught else could have done. The stubborn pride of the working man stronger and more unbending than that of the aristocrat. In the experience of a life that had thrown him very much among such men, he had met with such instances of stern, disinterested loyalty to themselves and their order, and had been compelled, spite of the natural prejudices of caste, to

admire and respect. Here was another instance—the great gulf fixed between him and the only woman he had ever really cared for, but who at that moment ceased to be for him the mere woman, the child with the beautiful brown eyes, and the beautiful brown hair, and the soft, smiling lips, and stood before him the representative of a class to which by political opinions he professed to, but never could, belong. As the proud head, bent down to search the girl's face, slowly erected itself, everything like warmth or tenderness of feeling had died out of his look, and out of his voice, too, as he said—

“You and your father having both set yourselves against me, I have nothing more to say; but”—and for the last time he laid his hand, the wounded hand she had so tenderly bandaged up for him, upon her arm; nor did she shrink from his touch now that it was one of anger and not of passion, it was of his love only she was afraid—“your eyes are the last woman's eyes I will ever

believe in. If they hadn't lied to me and told me that you cared more for me than for the other fellows—Mr. Barnett, and your cousin, and God only knows how many more—I shouldn't have made a fool of myself for nothing. Nonsense!" in answer to a look, for she had not spoken. "If you had cared for me you would have married me, in spite of all; any girl would. I dare say you're quite right. I don't blame you, but neither do I believe in you."

"Yes, you do, or you will when you are no longer angry with me. When I am gone you will remember many things that you have tried to forget; and though you may always be very glad that you did not marry me, you will believe that I loved you, that no other woman could ever love you better."

The words were not softly or tenderly spoken, or they might have touched him; they were sharp, rather, and abrupt—words of simple truth that would haunt him afterwards, but hardly convinced him now. He

lifted his brows incredulously, and with head erect still, and look dark and clouded, he turned and left her without another word or look. And she stood and watched him out of sight; stood and listened until the last echo of his footsteps had long since died away, until she realized that he was gone, never to return; then, everything like hope and courage having died out of her heart, she sank down upon the earth, covering her face with her hands. She had not left him, as she proposed. He had left her; so suddenly, too—in anger, and for ever! The sun was pouring its flood of rejoicing light down the dancing river, the birds sang, and the branches whispered overhead, and the big, ugly, sympathizing brute, of whom Carlton Treherne had been so often jealous, was trying with his wet nose to reach the hidden face. What cared she for all these things now? She lay just below the stile where they had first met and talked as friends, and she was blind to everything; deaf, too, to everything but the exceeding

bitter cry of her heart—"Oh, my love, my love! What will life be without you? Why did you go? What other woman will ever again love you as I do?"

END OF VOL. I.



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